

LÉON BLUM

FROM POET TO PREMIER

By

RICHARD L. STOKES



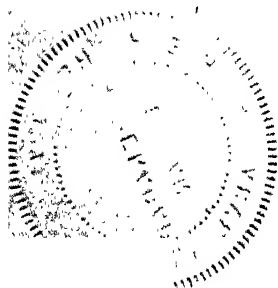
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OLIVER K. BOVARD

WITH ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE

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PREFACE

AMONG the paradoxes thronging the career of Léon Blum, rhymist, jurist and former millionaire, who became on June 4, 1936, the first Socialist and the first Hebraic Premier of France, not the least is a singularity which startled the author on his arrival last summer in Paris, with a commission to undertake a series of articles for the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*. Concerning this personage, one of the most discussed in the world, the entire Bibliothèque Nationale failed to yield more than half a dozen pages of biographical material. The official bookshop of the Socialist Party, in the Rue Victor Massé, was unable to produce so much as a paragraph on the life of its chieftain. "Principles count," I was admonished, "not men."

Nevertheless, in view of the Prime Minister's struggle to prevent France from dropping into either of the two bigotries, *Les deux mystiques*, of Communism and Fascism, it became clear that the future of democracy in Europe is to no small degree bound up with the character and intelligence of this one statesman. The design of attempting the present narrative rose from the curious discrepancy between his pre-eminent importance and the well-nigh total lack of available information concerning his personality and the events of his career. Since I was unable to gain access to his

private papers, this cannot pretend to be a definite work. Its hope is to function as a stop-gap till a standard account is written either by the Premier himself or some member of his intimate circle. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it is the first full-length biography of Léon Blum to be essayed in any language. It contains a quantity of data which I have not seen elsewhere in print, corrects a number of current errors and collates for the first time most of the references to the subject which occur in dozens of scattered magazines and books. In justice to M. Blum, the confession must be made that my recital of his career is wholly unauthorized. Perhaps it should be added that the writer is not a Socialist.

For aid in determining specific points of fact I am indebted to the generous courtesy of M. Célestin Bouglé, director of the École Normale Supérieure ; Prof. Isadore Lévy, of the Collège de France ; Principal A. Clermond, of the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly ; M. Cassagne, Censeur des Études at the Lycée Charlemagne ; M. François Crucy, director of the Press Bureau of the Présidence du Conseil ; and Mr. P. J. Philip, Paris correspondent of the *New York Times*. I beg to express to MM. Lucien and Georges Blum, brothers of the Premier, my cordial appreciation of their kindness to an inquisitorial stranger, and my thanks for three family

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photographs, hitherto unpublished, which they were good enough to place at my disposal. To the *Post-Dispatch* I extend heartfelt gratitude for its consent to the use of material contributed by the author to its columns, and in particular for the initial impulse to which this volume owes its being.

RICHARD L. STOKES

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LÉON BLUM

CHAPTER I

SOVEREIGN AND SONNETEER

BY hundreds of thousands, since early morning, the populace of Paris had been aflow. As afternoon waned, it began inundating the Boulevard Diderot and the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Antoine with vast torrents which had their confluence at the Place de la Nation. Above its fountain, where Louis Quatorze ascended a throne to receive the adulation of his capital, the tricolour dozed on the summer air. Nodding about it hung the ensigns of the Departments, one-third of which, on Bastille Day, July 14, 1936, were embellished with the fleur-de-lis of royal France. But the conquering colours were Moscow's sanguinary oriflamme. In a host of banners it flaunted by, garnished with one device or another, like the hammer and sickle or the numeral "III," denoting the Third International. Conspicuous shone the new emblem of the French Communist Party—a crimson field and a rectangle of blue and white bars affixed to the upper right corner like a postage stamp on an envelope. Scarcely a costume, of man, woman or child, lacked its splash of vermillion. There were red Phrygian bonnets, red neckerchiefs and cravats, arm-bands, sashes and even purses. To have worn the tricolour at one's buttonhole would have drawn

curious stares ; humming the *Marseillaise*¹ would have provoked murmurs of suspicion ; raising the right hand with open palm, in the bourgeois salute, would have been to invite assault.

With the gathering of dusk, a man appeared as if at a bound upon the speakers' rostrum. He was tall and erect, and neither slender nor stout. A thatch of grizzled hair was cut as if on purpose to resemble a toupee. Under a sloping but capacious forehead, through horn-rimmed glasses, peered the deep, tired eyes of a scholar. There was a walrus moustache, the joy of French cartoonists ; there were gaiters ; and from the lapel of a deftly modelled business suit of grey flared a Legion of Honour rosette. With a vigour of torso unexpected at sixty-four years, he hurled skywards a clenched hand in the proletarian signal. Thousands of fists darted aloft, and a myriad throats pealed the *Internationale*. Relayed by kilometres of amplifiers, the Bolshevik hymn swept the boulevards like a melodious hurricane. Then the orator was speaking, in a voice thin and harsh that swelled to raucous energy. He plied a lone, angular gesture—the arm stiffly outstretched and the hand closed save for a projecting index finger. With this digit he challenged the sky, transfixed his audience or belaboured a manuscript held in the left hand. It appeared, oddly enough, that the red chieftain was exhorting his battalions to patience. When

¹ This ode, banned as revolutionary under Empire and Restoration, is disapproved by the pacifist radicals of France on account of its truculence of rhythm and words. Musically it is as superior to the *Internationale* as Jurançon is to grenadine.

he had finished, a moment's hush was followed by a shout like the bellow of stormy surf. *Vive le roi!* had been the outcry of 1660.¹ Now, with an uproar as tumultuous, it was *Vive le Blum!* Small wonder that the crowned statues of Saint Louis and Philippe Auguste, on their 100-foot columns at the square's entrance, seemed deliberately to have turned their backs of bronze upon the impious spectacle.

In the presence of a triumph so curious, none could fail to marvel what was the earliest step towards Léon Blum's epiphany as first Socialist² and

¹ The Grand Monarque has been treated shabbily by posterity. His gardens at Versailles have become the mob's playground; the floors of his palace creak under the tread of tourists. He has been all but ejected from the Invalides by an upstart called Napoleon. And here, in his own ancient Place du Trône, the metropolis was lavishing its homage on a Jew!

² In M. Blum's phrase, Aristide Briand, René Viviani and Alexandre Millerand had "passed through" Socialism before their arrival at the Présidence du Conseil. Three years prior to Briand's first ministry (1909-10), he was expelled from the Socialist Party for accepting, without authority from his co-religionists, the portfolio of Public Instruction in Jean Sarrien's bourgeois cabinet. Briand used to say that he never left the Socialist Party, but was thrown out. One of the sect's more violent disputes arose when Millerand, in 1899, having failed even to consult his fellow-Socialists, entered the Waldeck-Rousseau government as Secretary of Commerce. Millerand had deserted to the Right long before his appointment as Premier in 1920. M. Blum is the first orthodox Socialist, in good standing with his own party, to become Prime Minister of France. His views of these three predecessors are to be found in print. Viviani was "a man of prey"; both he and Briand were, "at bottom, sceptics, almost cynics." For Millerand he reserved one of the most approbrious epithets in his vocabulary. The elder statesman, in his opinion, has always been "a calculator."

first Hebraic ruler of France. Was it a tyro's stammered speech before a cell of artisans, or fisticuffs of the classes in the Quartier Latin? Chance amused itself by placing the answer near at hand. The spiritual longitude between the Place de la Nation and the erudite cloisters of the Bibliothèque Nationale, in the Rue de Richelieu, may be fleetly traversed in a taxi. Here was to be found an exposition commemorating the quinquagenary of Symbolism, with sculptures of Rodin, paintings by Manet, van Gogh, Gauguin, Puvis de Chavannes, Burne-Jones, Henri Martin, Gustave Moreau and Fantin-Latour; holographs or rare editions of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, J.-K. Huysmans, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Henri de Régnier, Rémy de Gourmont, Émile Verhaeren, Maurice Maeterlinck, Anatole France, Pierre Louÿs, Paul Valéry, Maurice Barrès, André Gide, Henry Bataille, Oscar Wilde and Stuart Merrill; translations from Edgar Allan Poe, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and George Moore; and autograph manuscripts of the scores of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Wagner's overture to *Tannhäuser*, Duparc's *l'Invitation au Voyage*, Vincent d'Indy's prelude, *Les Opales*, and the *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* of Paul Dukas.

Amid such treasures, one not in search of the item could have happened only by accident upon a magazine of Japanese paper and yellow covers which bore the date of May 15, 1891, and the title of *La Conque*, or "The Sea-Shell." In those obscure and somewhat precious leaves, at the age of

nineteen, Léon Blum made his first public appearance. The initial rung of the ladder which he scaled to empire was, of all things, a sonnet. It is marked by a trait not frequent in that rigorous form. While constructing his octave, the poet wooed three rhymes for the vocable *bagues*. He found *vagues* and *dagues*; then, out of exhaustion or in mimicry of Poe's iterations, he used *vagues* a second time for tagging a verse. The lyric demonstrates that even in the callow years he possessed a gift for inserting himself into the choicest company; during the journal's brief existence his colleagues, among others, were Gide, Régnier, Valéry, Louÿs and Algernon Charles Swinburne. The opus represents also the introductory phase of that triple genius which renders the character of M. Blum so munificent a study. He has contrived to be at one and the same time a jurisconsult whose clear and magistral opinions form one of the glories of the Conseil d'État; a statesman of world-stature, subtle, tenacious, intrepid; and a superlative artist of prose style¹—a dramatic critic more profound than Sarcey, a critic of books as penetrating and learned as Sainte-Beuve, and the author of at least one volume, *Stendhal et le Beylisme*, which manifests not a few intimations of immortality.

For delineating a character thus complex, a glance at the genealogical background is usually

¹ "He knows the French tongue better than lots of Academicians."—Édouard Herriot in *l'Œuvre*, May 24, 1936.

profitable. But it appears that no data regarding M. Blum's family tree have ever been published or even assembled ; I recount the domestic legend conveyed politely but mistily by his brothers. In all likelihood, the clan of Blum hailed from one of the German ghettos. Frankfort has been suggested as the place of origin, though Léon Daudet's royalist sheet, *l'Action Française*, one of the most amusing journals of Paris, finds sport in reiterating that the Prime Minister stems from Bulgaria. The name was at first *Blume*, or flower. After ninety years in Paris, this refractory monosyllable of four letters still defeats assimilation and preserves its Teutonic sound of *Bloom* ; despite the fact that the French language instinctively Gallicizes alien patronymics, Wright becoming *Vreet* and Wilson *Veelsonh*. Prior to the French Revolution there were Blums dwelling in the hamlet of Nieder Bronn, near Strasbourg. Since their emancipation under Napoleon, the Hebrews of Alsace have been distinguished for loyalty to France. At the outset of the Dreyfus Affair, Michel Bréal exclaimed that the staff officer could not possibly be guilty, since it was inconceivable that an Alsatian Jew would betray the republic.¹ There, in 1835, we discover Nathan Blum, a lawyer ; his wife, born Henriette Hirsch ; and several children, among them a boy of five named Auguste. By all accounts, Nathan was an unworldly, bookish soul, innocent of the crafts of success. During the year cited the family removed to Holland, with the notion of mending its fortunes.

¹ Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*, 1932.

Having failed to prosper, they appeared ten years later in Paris, arriving in circumstances of desperate penury. Both Nathan and Henriette Blum died in the French capital, the former in 1860 and the latter in 1864.

Auguste Blum possessed business capacity of a high order. The fact that spinning-mills have long been a chief industry in Alsace probably led to his entry into the silk business. There is a whisper that as a boy of fifteen he peddled ribbons about the Paris shops. From some beginning thus abject he elaborated an enterprise which was organized in 1865 under the name of Blum Frères. Its development was solid though gradual. The Socialist Prime Minister has confessed that he was born not only a bourgeois but "a very small bourgeois."¹ Many years were required to assure its present proportions as one of the leading French houses for its speciality, the merchandising of silk materials used in millinery, such as laces, tulles, ribbons and velours. It was Auguste Blum who introduced into France the collapsible silk hat; this ultra-chic article of masculine headgear is known even to-day, in popular parlance, as a "Blum." At the opening of 1869 he took to wife, a Parisian Jewess, Mlle Marie Picart, and in the course of time begot five sons. Their names and dates of birth are as follows: Lucien, 1869; Léon, 1872; Marcel, 1875; Georges, 1877; and René, 1878. Léon became Premier of France on June 4, 1936. René, being

¹ Léon Blum, *l'Idéal socialiste*, in *La Revue de Paris*, May 1, 1924.

also artistic, directs the ballet of the opera house in Monte Carlo and the gambling casino at Cannes. Lucien, Marcel and Georges conduct the family business, which occupies the three first floors of a stately granite structure at No. 14, Rue du Quatre-Septembre, in Paris.

With something resembling a grimace of distaste, M. Lucien Blum acknowledged to me that neither Marcel, Georges nor himself is a Socialist. In fact, continued he, Léon's notoriety as an agitator has scarcely been favourable to the prosperity of the house. Unscrupulous rivals have been only too eager to press upon customers the folly of buying goods from a company with a Socialist as partner. But Léon, his brother insisted, is not and never has been a partner of Blum Frères. He owns no sou of its capital and derives from it not a centime of revenue. No single day has he worked in its office, and for several years he has refrained from entering the premises. Yet the beneficent autocracy with which Auguste Blum managed and developed his establishment did not elude the attention of his cleverest son. In a treatise entitled *La Réforme gouvernementale*, which was printed anonymously in 1918 and republished under the author's signature in June, 1936, M. Blum recurs again and again to twin comparisons adumbrating the ideal French Premier: he should be a "monarch"; he should be the "head of a business."

Having attained a patriarchal fullness of years, Auguste Blum died in 1921, bequeathing his share of the enterprise on impartial terms to his sons.

René and Léon, the latter of whom dates his first impulse toward Socialism from a boyish conception of the criminality of inherited wealth, lost no time in converting the legacies into cash, through a settlement with their brothers. For some years Léon figured in general esteem, or reproach, as a millionaire. Then the depression and changes of style in millinery drove the partnership of Blum Frères to the verge of insolvency. Into the gulf he flung most of his personal fortune—and lost it. These particulars are owed to an informant whose veracity is above suspicion, and who had them from M. Blum himself. No longer is he wealthy. As unearned increment he derives a modest income from investments. Welcome additions thereto are his ministerial salary of 180,000 francs a year, plus an allowance for housing, travel and entertainment ; and his annual pension of 34,661 francs as an Honorary State Counsellor. He is said to have drawn 24,000 francs a year as political editor of *Le Populaire*, a Socialist daily in which he acquired an interest during 1921, and the dark and forbidding quarters of which, on a shabby street of handicraft dwellings in the Montmartre district, constitute the stronghold from which, for fifteen years, he launched the attacks that led him to supreme power. It is moreover alleged that following his retirement from the Conseil d'État in 1919, he accepted large fees as attorney for various corporations, such as the Compagnie de Gaz of Bordeaux, the Blanchisseries de Thaon and the Galeries Lafayette, a department store chain ; not

to mention the syndicated stockholders of the Suez Canal and organized litigants against the State railways. But it is to be remembered that a corporation is regarded by enlightened Socialists with the tenderness of a butcher towards an animal fattening for slaughter. The huger a trust or cartel, the more easily it may be nationalized. The thought which blanches the cheeks of collectivists in France is that of hundreds of thousands of small farms and shops, each owned by a ferocious individualist.

M. Blum has twice been married—in 1896 to Mlle Lise Bloch, who died in 1931; and a year later to Mme Thérèse Pereya, both being Jewish and members of the intelligentsia, and neither of them wealthy. By his first wife he has a son, his only child, Robert, who was born in 1902, was graduated from the École Polytechnique in Paris, and is employed as an automotive engineer by the Hispano-Suiza company. The second Mme Blum is a sister of Mme Paul Dukas, whose husband is best known to concert enthusiasts in this country as the composer of *l'Apprenti sorcier*. The Premier resides at No. 25, Quai Bourbon, overlooking the Seine, a middle-class flat harbouring some relics of affluence, such as deep-piled carpets, massive furniture, a few choice art-pieces and a distinguished library, in which tomes on economics and sociology compete with rare editions of the poets of Greece, Rome, England, Germany and France. A widespread report that he possesses one of the most notable private collections of silverware in Europe

is declared by M. Georges Blum to be “an absurd fabrication of enemies which has taken on the proportions of a legend.” His ownership of the precious metal is confined to a service befitting his modest table.

CHAPTER II

AT SCHOOL

ON a Parisian thoroughfare of stalls and tenements, at No. 151, Rue Saint-Denis, exists a down-at-heels structure of six stories, half of which are utilized by shops. Through a narrow gate, by way of a dark and greasy corridor, one finds passage into a squalid quadrangle. On one of the upper floors Léon Blum was born, April 9, 1872. In the same house his four brothers entered the world. The district is that of *Les Halles centrales*, the popular market of the capital; opposite looms the church of Saint-Eustache, where in 1793 was celebrated the Feast of Reason. The head of the French government in 1872 was Louis-Adolphe Thiers, Gambetta's "sinister dwarf" and the "gory midget" of Lenin. About the quarter hung the breath of *La semaine sanglante*, May 22-28, 1871, during which the French army avenged its defeat by extinguishing the Paris Commune in the blood of 20,000 working-men, Bismarck having for that purpose released 130,000 military captives. His annexation of Alsace drove thousands of loyalists between 1872 and 1874 to seek refuge in France, among them a Jewish industrialist of Mulhouse who arrived in Paris with a son of fifteen named Alfred Dreyfus; and a penniless Catholic widower, a teacher of mathematics, who fled from Altkirch to Vitry-le-François with two children, the younger a boy called Lucien Herr. When the last German soldier evacuated France, on September 16, 1873,

Léon was seventeen months old. A few years later, like multitudes of urchins, he was brandishing a toy sword, piping the battlecry of *Revanche!* and leading his playmates, the sons of artisans and shopkeepers, in assault against the "Prussians."¹ Two happenings of mark environed his cradle. Seized by one of their epidemics of devotion, the French during 1873 dedicated themselves in a body to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; the monument of that convulsion is the basilica of *Sacre Cœur*, on the butte of Montmartre. And on January 30, 1875, touching the absolute zero of political ineptitude, the French Parliament, to its subsequent horror, voted by a majority of one, though overwhelmingly monarchist and clerical, the establishment of a republican constitution.²

The most powerful influence on Léon's childhood was exerted by his maternal grandmother. Mme Picart kept a bookshop in the Place Dauphine, on the Île de la Cité; it was a favourite resort of the most prominent members of the legal profession, who were attracted by the conversation of its intelligent and cultivated mistress.³ "She was a woman," relates her grandson,⁴ "who was deeply

¹ Emil Lengyel in the *New York Times Magazine*, May 24, 1936.

² Alexandre Zévaès, *Histoire de la Troisième République*, 1926.

³ She was not blind, as John Gunther asserts in *Inside Europe*. The sightless member of the family was an aunt of the first Mme Blum. Jules Renard observed that "Léon Blum is touching with his old blind aunt. As gracious as Antigone, he waits upon her, removes her plates, and cuts her meat."—*Journal inédit*, May 17, 1899.

⁴ Louis Lévy, *Comment ils sont devenus socialistes*, 1932.

affected by George Sand and Pierre Leroux.¹ She had taken part sentimentally in the *Journées de juin*;² she was an ardent republican under the Empire. A widow with a child,³ she had even posed to herself the question of regicide, as a case of conscience. Her sisters, more bourgeois, called her *La communarde*. One of the first books she gave me to read was that of Ténot⁴ on the Coup d'État." Hardly less potent was the ascendancy of his mother, whom he declares to have been the most conscientious being he has known. "I never," avers he, "encountered in any one such intensity of scruple. She carried a sense of justice to the point of morbidity. I was reared with a brother (Lucien) slightly older than myself. When our mother gave us apples for lunch, she did not present each with a whole apple. She cut a pair of apples in two, and gave to either of us one-half of each fruit. Only thus, it appeared to her, could the division be made impartial." With a mother so pathologically exact, hatred of unfairness became a vital element in Léon's character. "My revolt against injustice,"

¹ This author (1789-1871) was a disciple of Saint-Simon, translated Goethe's *Werther*, and wrote against wealth and Christianity. His chief work, published in two volumes during 1839, is *de l'Humanité, de son principe et de son avenir*.

² June 23-26, 1848, when civil war raged in the Paris streets between the working class and a republican dictatorship under Cavaignac. The Socialist Party was crushed, and way was opened to the Second Empire.

³ Léon's mother, Marie Picart.

⁴ Pierre-Paul-Eugène Ténot (1839-1890). The book referred to is *Paris en décembre*, 1851, which was published in 1868.

he states, "is as old as my consciousness ; rather than submit to an unrighteous punishment, I would have endured anything." As a child, he annoyed his father with questions as to how he could honestly buy goods at a low price and sell them at a dearer one.¹ Inborn also was a second trait, repugnance to discipline. "I was an insubordinate pupil. I played truant from school. If I had not stood first in my class, penalties would have showered upon me."²

Construing one of his early homilies³ as a personal record, we find that he was a boy prone to sickness, avid of affection and precociously mistrustful. He describes himself as a frail and impressionable child, with feelings as candid as those of a girl in a novel. Mozart, he recalls, famous at the age of ten, would never play before demanding of the crowds about him : "Do you love me ?" With this artless query Léon also yearned to address every one he met, including those to whom he was indifferent and even those whom he would have liked to hate. "The trouble is that I put the interrogation too often, and never quite believed the answers." When the physical pain was not unbearable, he felt "an exquisite voluptuousness in being ill ; it is delightful

¹ With one exception, *Stendhal* is a work of pure literature, unstained by doctrine. That exception is an accent upon the "bourgeois baseness" of the household into which the novelist was born. I have wondered whether such passages do not vibrate with an autobiographical echo.

² Louis Lévy, *Comment ils sont devenus socialistes*.

³ Léon Blum, *Declamatio suasoria*, in *La Revue Blanche*, August-September, 1892.

to see about your bed so many persons who appear to love you, and cannot find enough smiles, words of comfort and flattering attentions." But chill as an ague was the effect of emerging from this heated atmosphere of caresses into the street, amid the indifference of strangers. "Crueller yet is the slight relaxation of love among one's loved ones. Restless and imaginative spirits tend to pervert the least phrase, to parody the slightest gesture. You fancy that of those who entered during the day not one has spoken with genuine cordiality, and that all were in haste to leave you."

Though his street associates were gamins of toil, Léon attended only private schools.¹ He was marked out as an intellectual among his brothers from the beginning, and there was no thought of apprenticing him to the shop. His earliest seminary was the Institution Roux, a grammar school in the Rue d'Aboukir, near his home, which he entered at the age of six. Five years later he progressed to the Lycée Charlemagne, where he became one of the most redoubtable snatchers of prizes in the history of that nursery of French genius. Through its obscure portal at No. 101 Rue Saint-Antoine, in the shadow of the Bastille's column, with a Jesuit church on one hand and on the other the pushcarts of the

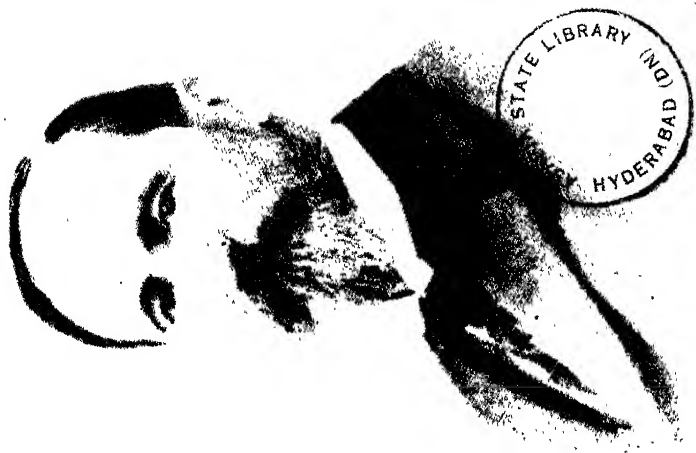
¹ The cost of private instruction was not excessive. Tuition at the Lycée Charlemagne during the 'eighties was 250 francs per year, or 50 dollars at the exchange then in effect. Léon had contrived to escape from home, and during most of the five years when he was registered in this college lived at the Institution Kahn, one of several *pensions* in the neighbourhood where students were lodged and fed.



LÉON BLUM'S MOTHER, MME AUGUSTE
BLUM (*Née* MARIE PICART)



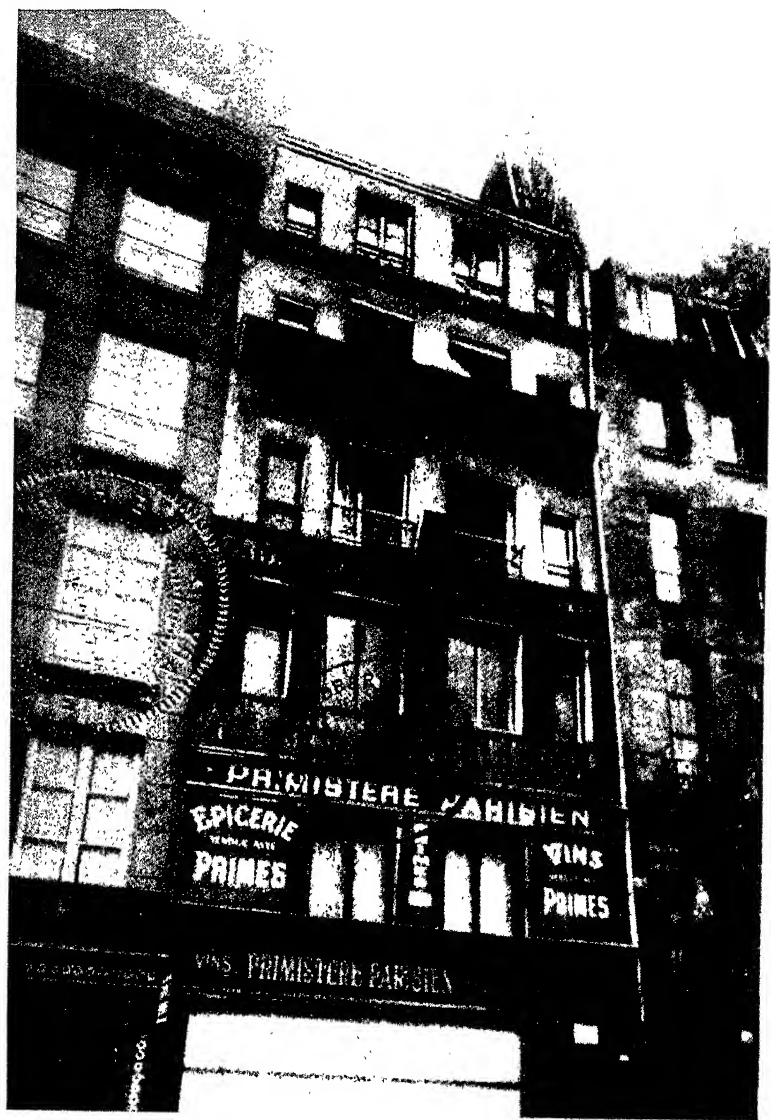
AUGUSTE BLUM, FATHER OF
LÉON BLUM



AUGUSTE BLUM, FATHER OF
LÉON BLUM



LÉON BLUM'S MOTHER, MME AUGUSTE
BLUM (*Née* MARIE PICART)



LÉON BLUM'S BIRTHPLACE
No. 151, Rue Saint-Denis, Paris.

daughters of those Furies who marched upon Versailles in 1789 to capture a king—through its black and narrow gate have trooped such golden lads as Victor Hugo, Jules Michelet, Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Francisque Sarcey, Louis-Auguste Blanqui, Théophile Gautier, François-Élie-Jules Lemaître, Jean Richepin, Émile Faguet, Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier and Marie-François Sadi-Carnot ; to say nothing of Marshals Joffre and Maunoury and Maurice de Féraudy, star of the Comédie Française.

During four years Léon headed his class in general excellence as a student. At the end of his initial term he was in possession of first prizes in French and German, Latin verse and prose, elocution, history, geography and natural science ; with a second prize in mathematics. During 1884-85 he gained first prizes in French, Latin, Greek, history and geography ; second prizes in German, declamation and mathematics ; and a second *accessit*¹ in science. His record for the third term was first prizes in French and Latin composition, Greek, German, declamation, history and geography ; with a second prize for mathematics and second *accessit* in physics. During the fourth year he won first prizes in Latin prose and verse, French composition, history and geography ; second prizes in Greek and German, and second *accessits* in mathematics and physics. Reposing somewhat on his laurels during 1887-1888, he stood second in general excellence

¹ L., "he came near," a mark denoting honourable mention in French and English schools.

and won first prizes only in history and Latin composition, with a second prize in French composition, second *accessits* in Greek and gymnastics, and a third *accessit* in geography. He did not remain for the last term of the Lycée Charlemagne's six-year course, but passed from the right to the left bank of the Seine for two terms at the Lycée Henri IV, which specializes in preparing students for entrance examinations at the École Normale Supérieure.

An event which he regards mystically as a turning-point in his life occurred during his attendance at the Lycée Charlemagne. "I can recall," narrates he,¹ the first impression which directed me to the Socialist idea, or rather which began to create in me a disposition of latent and diffuse thought to which, some years later, the two men who became my masters, Lucien Herr and Jean Jaurès, were to supply an exact form." A benevolent principal had thrown open the library to students during their hours of recess. One afternoon, within its shadows, Léon was thumbing the leaves of this volume and that. He was fourteen years old. His attention was caught by a page in the third act of a comedy by Émile Augier entitled *Les Effrontés*,² or "The Malaperts." The time is around 1845 and the scene is the luxurious study of Vernouillet, a newspaper proprietor. Joining in the dialogue are Giboyer, his madcap secretary ; Charrier, a banker ;

¹ Léon Blum, *l'Idéal socialiste*.

² First performed at the Théâtre Français, in Paris, on January 10, 1861 ; published the same year with a dedication to Prosper Mérimée,

and the saturnine Marquis d'Auberive. Giboyer remarks that the French people are like a certain gentleman who contracted eight head-colds in one month, and cured them all except the first. "Fulfil the Revolution of 1789," he moralizes, "and you will have nothing to fear." He proposes the creation of "an aristocracy outside of money." On what, inquires the Marquis, could such a caste be based in democratic France? "On the very principle of democracy," answers Giboyer, "which is merit." But that conception has already been realized, exclaims Charrier; and Vernouillet adds that wealth, being the result of labour, is precisely the standard which most nearly approximates merit. Giboyer retorts: "There is one point which destroys your standard from top to bottom. It is that wealth is hereditary and intelligence is not." In the presence of the last seven words the future Premier underwent his first disturbance, his earliest pause, before society as conventionally regulated. "My frank intelligence as a child," comments he, "found nothing in reply to Giboyer's weighty argument; and even to-day my adult intelligence, though better exercised, discovers no answer.¹ It is perhaps from this contradiction posed by Giboyer, between the individual character of merit and the patrimonial character of property, that one may draw the simplest, the most clearly accessible definition of the Socialist idea."

¹ One rejoinder might be that intelligence, as a matter of fact, is rather commonly hereditary. M. Blum's own case is apposite.

With his transfer to the Lycée Henri IV, at No. 23 Rue Clovis, across the street from the church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont,¹ began a residence of six years amid the throng of learned institutions clustering about the Panthéon. At this college, where he shared a bench with André Gide, Léon continued his devastating course as a gobbler of prizes. Though well acquainted with Henri Bergson, he was not, as John Gunther states in *Inside Europe*, a pupil of the apostle of the *élan vital*; his professor of philosophy at the Lycée Henri IV was Henry Michel. In 1890, after a triumphant bout with the tests of admission, he proceeded to the École Normale Supérieure, at No. 45, Rue d'Ulm—that august academy which has fulfilled with so much renown, since 1763, its function of training teachers of the loftiest professorial rank. His avowed goal was a chair of philosophy.² Two of his fellow-classmen were Célestin Bouglé, now principal of the École Normale; and Édouard Herriot, later Prime Minister and at the moment President of the Chamber of Deputies. His room-mates were René Beaunier, afterwards a well-known essayist and novelist; and Philippe Berthelot, who became professor at the Université Libre of Brussels and the author of valued tomes on Platonism and evolution. His more conspicuous instructors were Édouard Tournier in Greek, Othon Riemann in Latin, and

¹ Here rest the bones of two authors frequently cited by Léon Blum, Jean Racine and Blaise Pascal.

² The title of professor is in France one of enviable standing; it is not, as in America, shrill with overtones of railleury.

in French composition Ferdinand Brunetière, himself a noted literary critic.

Here and there, from the youthful dissertations, flash references to normalian life. "In rhetoric my companions and I found vivid pleasure in remote, daring metaphors and neologic temerities. Whereupon our master would grumble: 'Do you think Saint-Évremond wrote like that?'"¹ The students were addicted to poker and frequented collegiate balls such as those of the École Polytechnique, as they meant leave of absence at night. They wore brown flannel shirts under coats far from spotless, champed on stub pipes, were vain of being dirty, and cherished abominable oaths. At the noon recess they would mount the crepuscular staircase to dormitories under the roof, guzzle coffee and tobacco, and argue furiously about cosmic enigmas until a functionary, at 1.30, shouted aloft from the courtyard: "Gentlemen, the lecture on philosophy!"²

Abruptly, after one year only, Léon forsook Kant and Hegel for the law, and spanned the block or so dividing the École Normale from the Faculté du Droit of the University of Paris. Thus promptly and decisively did an instinct disclose itself that his career was to be forensic rather than academic, public rather than cloistered. In 1894 he took with highest honours the degree of bachelor of law, and a year

¹ Léon Blum, *Le goût classique*, in *La Revue Blanche*, January, 1894.

² Léon Blum, *Le Livre des mes amies*, in *La Revue Blanche*, June, 1893.

later, having brilliantly surmounted the requisite examinations, entered the service of the Conseil d'État. This is one of two high tribunals which in France combine something of the functions of the United States Supreme Court. The bench of last resort in civil and criminal cases is the Cour de Cassation ; before it would have been taken the Hauptmann appeal. The Conseil d'État advises Parliament on the phrasing and technical legality of its statutes, either prior or subsequent to their adoption. No Gallic John Marshall having as yet arisen, it has uniformly declined to adjudicate legislative policy. At its bar any citizen believing himself to have been wronged by the State may sue for reparation ; or the State may prosecute a citizen alleged to have violated its ordinances. There, for nearly a quarter of a century, Léon Blum acted as Auditeur, or Referee ; Maître des Requêtes, or Master of Petitions ; and Government Commissary. Following the World War, he retired with the button of a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, a pension, the title of Honary State Counsellor and an intimate, professional mastery of the French legal and constitutional systems.

But our concern at the moment lies in the equipment with which, during 1894, he emerged from his scholastic chrysalis into the world of affairs. He was a graduate attorney, with a dawning taste for economics and social philosophy, and an active interest in government and politics. Widely read in history, he possessed more than a smattering of science. Latin he wrote with fluency, whether in

prose or metre. He was skilled in the literatures of Greece and Germany ; and had managed, outside the formal curriculum, not only to peruse Shakespeare with attention, but to explore some of the byways of English letters. In the essays, for example, are allusions to Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Disraeli's *Lothair*. He knew by heart entire volumes of Hugo's poetry, and was profoundly versed in the French classics. The basis was laid for what was to become an encyclopædic familiarity with modern literary movements. He was a tireless playgoer, an amateur of painting and sculpture, and a tonal enthusiast busy with the development of that hospitable ear which soon was to find pleasure in Bach or Ravel, Beethoven or Debussy. None of the arts was alien to him, not even gastronomy.¹ Moreover, since 1891, he had been a sedulous contributor to various periodicals.

It so happens that Jules Renard, author of *La Bigote*, *Le Pain de ménage*, *Monsieur Vernet* and other stage successes, who was born in 1864, kept a diary extending from June 15, 1887, to April 6, 1910, a few weeks before his death. There are more than thirty references to Léon Blum, many of them graphically descriptive. It is curious that at this early period the resolute Prime Minister of the future should have inspired metaphors chiefly of a feminine character. M. Renard likens him to Antigone and Egeria. One entry reads : " Léon Blum, a beardless young man, with the voice of a girl, who can recite for two hours by the clock from

¹ Louis Lévy in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, June 6, 1936.

Pascal, La Bruyère, Saint-Évremond, etc.”¹ And again, at the time of the Fashoda incident : “ Léon Blum explained precisely and eloquently the absurdity of an Anglo-French war. He is charming, this beardless young man, who might be an imbecile, but who comments luminously on the most difficult subjects.”² On the other hand, the Proustian stripling became adept at the manly pastime of fencing, and devoted many years to the art of the foil.

Beyond all else, he had made the acquaintance, though as yet merely in passing, of one of the two men whose influence was to weigh most heavily upon his life. As he has again and again proclaimed, Lucien Herr was his intellectual master, and Jean Jaurès his mentor in politics. As to outward seeming, Herr was the obscure and nameless librarian of the École Normale, the collection of which he modernized in a fashion that made history in the bookish science. But his true vocation was that of fisher of men for Socialism. Preferably he hunted leviathans ; among others, he barbed for the faith Albert Thomas, Marcel Déat and Jaurès. His most distressing failure was with Georges Clemenceau, whom he coveted passionately for his creel ; but the wily Jacobin eluded every plunge of the gaff. In 1890, Léon Blum was too small a sprat to invite a cast of that formidable hook. Besides—and he was susceptible to environment—the temper of the École Normale was Bergsonian rather than Socialist ; the intellectual fad of the day was Anarchism.

¹ Jules Renard, *Journal inédit*, November 1, 1895.

² *Ibid.*, November 9, 1898.

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHOR BEGINS

THE æsthetic complement of philosophical Anarchy,¹ which rejects all forms of government, was Symbolism, which denied every artistic law, including the shameful obligation of being intelligible. Two of its masterpieces were Mallarmé's *l'Après-midi d'un faune* and Debussy's orchestral exegesis of that peculiar idyll ; they have suffered the humiliation of growing not only comprehensible but popular. At the height of the ferment Pierre Louÿs, who was twenty-one, became afflicted by the thought that no journal existed in which the very youngest poets might enjoy their say. Impulsively he founded *La Conque*, a rubric to which was subjoined this explanatory line of Henri de Régnier : *Où se souffle un appel d quelque dieu qui passe*. The prospectus was a trifle sniffish ; there were to be twelve issues and no more,² each comprising 100 copies only, but all numbered and printed on paper *de luxe*. "This anthology will not be continued or republished," warned young M. Louÿs, adding pointedly that subscriptions would be received at No. 49 Rue Vineuse. By way of "frontispiece," authors of established fame were summoned to

¹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1856) is generally termed the "Father of Anarchism." His school supplied Léon Blum with his earliest creed. "It must be taken into account," he apologized forty years later, "that individualist doctrines have their attraction for very young men."—Louis Lévy, *Comment ils sont devenus socialistes*.

² Eleven were actually printed.

provide stanzas theretofore unprinted. Among those responding were Leconte de Lisle, Hérédia, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Judith Gautier and Swinburne, who contributed *The Ballad of Melicertes*. This series of opuscles forms to-day one of the rarest of collectors' items; the Symbolist Exposition itself was able to glean only two examples. Its celebrity is not due, alas, to the versecraft of Léon Blum,¹ who was responsible for an abundance of sonnets and *Petites choses*, or "Trifles." It happened that both he and Paul Valéry,² aged twenty, made their literary bows in the first issue; this and succeeding numbers were adorned by the latter with twelve of the poems which speedily became renowned under the title of *l'Album de vers anciens*. A hint has been ventured that Léon's apparition as a rhymester was not deterred by a plentiful stock of small change, which acquired lyrical merit of its own when the printer's bills came in.³ But the legend that he "bought his way" into sundry periodicals must be regarded with caution. I am not aware that he gained individual control of important sums until his forty-ninth year, at the death of Auguste Blum; then, to be sure, he purchased control of his own

¹ "Though he is sensitive to poetry," says André Gide, "his is the most anti-poetic head that I know."

² Born in 1871 and hailed at the beginning of his second decade as a troubadour of genius, Paul Valéry after 1897 fell into a mysterious silence that lasted twenty years. On resuming the pen, he produced works compelling his recognition as one of the leading French poets of our day. He served as President of the Symbolist Exposition, though he repudiated the movement long years ago.

³ Emil Lengyel, *supra*.

newspaper, *Le Populaire*. Almost from the start his prose writings were distinguished enough to find a path through their own unabatted desert. Be that as it may, his débutant muse exacts quotation as a matter of record. The date of publication fell within his second semester at the École Normale :

SONNET

La nuit, l'eau calme des bassins,
Au reflet des lumières vagues,
Forme d'imaginaires vagues
Et de fantastiques dessins.

Ce sont de bizarres coussins
Brodés de colliers et de bagues,
Des chevaliers dressant leur dagues,
Des fleurs larges comme des seins. . . .

. . . Des formes chétives et frêles
De femmes et de sauterelles,
D'oiseaux clair et de papillons

Dansent aussi sur l'eau tranquille,
Dont l'éclair fuyant des rayons
Respecte le rêve immobile.¹

Not often, in Paris itself, has articulate youth been so possessed with fury to see itself in print as during the years pivoting about 1890. A variole of gazettes, with such titles as *The Red Review*, *The*

¹ If there were a single trace, throughout M. Blum's dozen volumes, of a sense of humour, I should instantly pronounce this confection to be a travesty of certain Impressionist runes. "He is most intelligent, but hasn't a grain of wit."—Jules Renard, *Journal inédit*, March 3, 1903.

Centaure, *The Scamp* and *The Madman*, raged on either bank of the Seine. There was *La Revue Verte*, the issues of which were confined to a single copy, passed from hand to hand ; but one of its editors was Marcel Proust, a schoolboy of seventeen. Other journals, for want of funds, had recourse to the mimeograph. Extraordinary was the number of talented men whose earliest works saw the light in these forgotten periodicals. Among the more solid were *La Revue Blanche* (1891-1903), a publication inspired by Anarchism, in which were fought the opening French engagements on behalf of Tolstoi and Ibsen ; and *Le Mercure de France*, founded in 1890 as an organ of international culture, which survives to the present day. In that epoch, few tears were squandered on a demising periodical. *La Conque* was barely underground when Léon transferred his metrical affections to a "review of youth" called *Le Banquet*, in obeisance to Plato's "Symposium." It was founded in March, 1892, by recent alumni of the Lycée Condorcet ; among the guiding spirits were Fernand Gregh, Daniel Halévy, G.-A. de Caillavet and Henri Barbusse. Across cerulean covers the title flamed in scarlet. For printing costs a tax of 8s. a month each was levied upon contributors ; after one issue the circulation was reduced, for economy's sake, from 400 copies to 200. There were eight editions in a twelve-month. The number for March, 1893, presented introductory chapters of a novel, *La Comtesse de Tripoli*, by Robert de Flers. At the end of the instalment, on

the magazine's final page, stood the legend : " To be continued " ; whereupon the journal vanished forever, without apology. " The treasury was empty and we were tired of our sport."¹ But in the second issue was published the earliest French appreciation of Nietzsche, from the pens of Gregh and Halévy. Voice had also been accorded to some of the first disquisitions of Proust, who was twenty-one. Neither he nor his collaborators, who deplored his monocle and lisp of the Boulevard Saint-Germain, suspected that in a quarter century he was to be embraced by immortality. Regarding Léon Blum's participation, I have resurrected a solitary scholium. In these pages, Léon Pierre-Quint observes, the future Socialist commander " addressed a number of pleasing quatrains to the moon."²

His obsequies as a poet—so far, at least, as publication is concerned—appear to have accompanied those of *Le Banquet*. Having measured his own rhymes, frequently on adjoining folios, against the splendours of Hérédia and Valéry, he was so fortunate as to discern, on coming of age, that Erato could never prove his mistress. The courtship of a deity less august he undertook with a sigh, but found comfort in reflecting that the practice of verse, which sensitizes diction and sublimates the ear, had been no mean school for a workman in prose. His inaugural essay appeared in *La Revue Blanche* of July, 1892 ; and here once more was

¹ Robert Dreyfus, *Souvenirs de Marcel Proust*, 1926.

² Marcel Proust, *sa vie, son œuvre*, 1925.

exemplified his knack for emerging into supreme literary society. Among his fellow-contributors in this noted magazine were Mallarmé, Verlaine, Hérédia, Gourmont, Proust, Tristan Bernard, Romain Coolus, Émile Verhaeren and Knut Hamsun. Claude Debussy became music critic of *La Revue Blanche* in April, 1901. His articles were reprinted posthumously, twenty years later, in a book entitled *Monsieur Croche, antidilettante*; some of its mockeries are acutely discomfiting to the Perfect Wagnerite. Prophetically enough, Léon Blum's first theme was not artistic but social. For his title, *Les Progrès de l'Apolitique en France*, the author ventured, with *amoralité* as precedent, upon one of his "neologic temerities." The French people, he complained, had forfeited all gusto for revolution. Neither the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon, the overthrow of the Commune nor the rise of General Boulanger had stirred Paris to its ancient cult of the barricade. Individualism, scion of the industrial revolution, had despoiled France of her genius for collective mutiny. From which the twenty-year-old statesman solemnly inferred that the destiny of his country would not be Socialism but Anarchy. The dedication, "To M. Maurice Barrès, deputy from the second district of Nancy," recalls that as a youth Léon bowed with idolatry before two men—in politics, Georges Clemenceau, the Clemenceau of *La Justice*; and, in literature, the esoteric stylist of *Déracinés* and *Jardin de Bérénice*.¹

¹ The affectionate intimacy between Barrès and his acolyte was shattered by the Dreyfus Affair.

His exercise in the rhetoric of ingratiating, *Declamatio suasoria*, appeared in the journal's next number. It merits further quotation as a bit of self-analysis not without mirth, considering M. Blum's present activity in a field the prime necessity of which is thickness of skin. Reading in his garret, the essayist hears far below the hoofbeats of weary horses; carts laden with produce are faring at 3 a.m. to *Les Halles*. His eye is seized by a verse of poignant generosity in Racine's *Phèdre*. It is the farewell message of Hippolyte to Thésée, his father, by whom he has been sentenced unjustly to die. The boy's last thought is of the maiden Aricie, a hostage at the Athenian court:

Dis-lui qu'avec douceur il traite sa captive.

From his open window—"I have always loved the sound of my voice in the night"—our young orator beseeches life to deal gently with himself, its prisoner. There are heroes so valiant as to endure with confidence every disillusionment and iniquity. Saintly souls can achieve that equilibrium between desire and capacity which is known as resignation. There are Stoics of a pride so towering that, in Seneca's phrase, they console themselves when hit by lightning with the thought of how considerable a stir of natural forces was required for their destruction. "But I was not made for suffering. I sense within myself a heart fragile before life, a spirit at once tender and scornful. . . . Essentially I remain the small boy that I was, delicate and susceptible to the point of ridicule. . . . I am a

feeble plant, not strong enough to grow alone, which needs attentive care, frequent sprinklings and alternate shade and sun."¹

As the hero of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Julien Sorel, was first to point out, the mandatory trait of Occidental life is action. Between action and thought, however, is fixed a gulf. One cannot recommend too strongly that delightful romance, *Lothair*, which Lord Beaconsfield composed at the midway of his career.² It shows that a young man of fortunate character may become disgusted with action because it is too easy, and because his intelligence is genuine. But who knows? "Perhaps it is only in action, feverish and precipitate, that one loses the consciousness of acting." In the meantime, let no one mock at philosophers of twenty who give their nights to yearning and tears. "Despair is not an enjoyable trade; and if you prefer to imagine that we play a part, then the rôle is scarcely amusing." It is no light task to reject or distort all the agreeable sensations which life offers, and to experience profound melancholy in a pleasant conversation, the sight of a graceful woman or a beautiful sunset. "Exactly on this phrase," the harangue concludes portentously, "the sun rose."³

Thereafter, while prosecuting his studies at the

¹ Artists have moods in which they fancy themselves pitiful, helpless babes. Actually they belong to the feral genus of the human order.

² The most successful of Disraeli's novels was published during 1870, in the sixty-sixth of his seventy-seven years.

³ *La Revue Blanche*, August-September, 1892.

Faculté du Droit and until the end of 1894, Léon contributed to *La Revue Blanche* four or five extensive articles each year. His third, occasioned by the death of the author of the *Vie de Jésus* and *Les Apôtres*, was printed in the issue of November, 1892, with the title of *Premiers Paradoxes sur Renan*. The great sceptic is charged with merely transposing his beliefs : " In his ripe age he accorded to the methods of science the same superstitious respect which he had as a child for the Scriptures." It is added that " nothing is less scientific than belief in the perfectibility of science," and that " this philosophy of intelligence is not an intelligent philosophy." Conceding the truth of these aphorisms, one might retort that as paradoxes they are not brilliantly paradoxical ; and that M. Blum, in his ripe age, bestows more credit upon *Das Kapital* than upon the Torah, Prophets and Hagiographa combined.¹ There ensued a dialogue between a lad and an older man, *Fragment sur la gloire*, which may be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the measureless appetite for fame which devoured the youthful penman, who nevertheless espied in such ambition " an intolerable egotism." One outburst is startlingly presageful : " I envy the restless pride of a man who knows that in his hand lies the destiny of a world."² We may neglect,

¹ Jules Renard, a Catholic, once accompanied Léon Blum to a synagogue in the Rue de la Victoire. The playwright found the building cold and the service wearisome. He added : " Blum smiled ; he smiled too much."—*Journal inédit*, February 20, 1896.

² *La Revue Blanche*, December, 1892.

without privation, the *Fragment sur la prière*, the *Fragment sur l'espérance* and *le Livre des mes amies*;¹ but a momentary halt is incumbent before *Annie, ou les fiançailles d'argent*, which was published in September, 1893. Weeks before unearthing the files of *La Revue Blanche*, when I was savouring the limpid narrative and sprightly dialogue of the "case-histories" which enliven *Du mariage*, I was struck by the thought: "This man could write a novel." Some days later, what was my pleasure at discovering the announcement (1907) of a forthcoming romance, *Les raisons du cœur*, by Léon Blum! But "Heart's Logic" was never published; the manuscript was withdrawn by the author and reposes to this day, unless it has been destroyed, in his confidential archives. *Annie*, then, is worth a glance as his earliest sortie into fiction—an acrid sketch wherein a boy of sixteen, loving a girl of twelve, finds on meeting her two years later, with skirts prolonged and coiffured hair, that he is attracted by her small sister. Not too obscurely the *dénouement* lurks: he has been repelled by the child's attainment of puberty. A second tale, *Eliane, ou le regret*, concerns another boy of such untimely indifference that he cannot return the passion of a charming miss, though she dies of love. The articles in *La Revue Blanche* during 1894 were *Le goût classique*, a spirited defence of the cultural value of Greek and especially Latin; a commentary on Paul Bourget and two imaginative drafts, *La proie et l'ombre* and *Anecdote sur la danse*.

¹ *La Revue Blanche*, January, May and June, 1893.

But the quiet of his academic grove was about to be shivered and the current of his blood deflected by three events which, from remote points of the compass, were fatefully nearing conjunction. In 1893 Jean Jaurès was elected as a Socialist from the Department of Tarn to the Chamber of Deputies, where he had sat four years, beginning with 1885, as a member of the Left Centre. Orator, polemist and historian, he was born in 1859 at Castres, in meridional France ; his first election to the Chamber was due to his paternal uncle, the great man of the district, who had been Ambassador to Spain and Russia, and Minister of Marine. The nephew's shift from conservative to radical, afterwards a theme of scandal among his opponents, had sprung from a markworthy episode. Retired by his constituents in 1889, he joined the faculty of the University of Toulouse as a lecturer on philosophy. A year later he resolved to prepare a doctoral thesis, and settled down to work in the library of the École Normale, of which he was an alumnus. Lucien Herr was not slow to recognize that a behemoth had swum within his ken. Researches into the French Revolution had guided Jaurès to the last brink of republican theory. In a famous session that lasted a whole night through, Herr persuaded him to venture the one additional step into Socialism.¹ The nature of the victorious

¹ Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*. At this moment the librarian inclined to a sect called Allemanist after its leader, Jean Allemane, typesetter and political prophet. He had endeared himself to Herr in particular by his invention of the general strike.

argument may be extracted from a lecture on Jaurès which was delivered by Léon Blum at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs, in Paris, on February 16, 1933, when the disciple declared his master to have been an orator superior to Vergniaud and equal to Bossuet and Mirabeau ; as well as a poet of Biblical imagery.¹ Universal suffrage being granted, Herr maintained, Socialism is a necessary consequence, for a citizen cannot be free and equal politically unless he is free and equal economically. Laveleye had pointed out the absurdity of a *régime* under which the proletariat is electorally sovereign and socially miserable. Whatever the merits of this syllogism, of which one is persuaded that Léon Blum the critic or attorney would have made short shrift, the circumstances of Jaurès' conversion had a far-reaching effect upon the growth and particularly the character of proletarianism in twentieth-century France ; it determined that the policy of the Blum Ministry would be constitutional rather than revolutionary. Herr's philosophy, imparted to Jaurès and bequeathed to Léon Blum, was based on the principle that in a democracy like France it is possible for Socialism to attain its utmost ends, without violence, bloodlessly and lawfully, by means of the ballot. The debate between Herr and Jaurès moreover led to the first meeting, in 1896, at the instance of Herr, between Léon Blum and the

¹ One of his celebrated tropes was flung off in the heat of debate. Reproached with inconsistency, Jaurès thundered : " It is in descending to the sea that a river remains true to its source ! "

man who was to flame before him through life as hero and exemplar ; and of whom, nearly two score years afterwards, he could still say : " At difficult moments, it is in accord with the memory and teachings of Jean Jaurès that I try to regulate my acts. I do not demand of myself what he would do in my place ; I have never had the presumption, even in thought, to substitute myself for him. But I ask : What would he wish that I, such as I am, should do ? "¹

It was decreed also by fortune that on a summer day in 1893 Léon Blum should cross the Place de la Concorde and there encounter, for the first time in more than two years, Lucien Herr. As editorial secretary of *La Revue de Paris*, in which capacity he had introduced to the public, among other authors, Romain Rolland, Georges de Porto-Riche and Mme de Noailles, the latter was no doubt cognizant of the former's burgeonings as a magazine writer. The minnow of the École Normale had gained bulk. Perhaps the young law student now merited a cast of the fly. They walked together, tramping back and forth along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. In those two hours what had been a casual acquaintance ripened into an intimacy which was to become an inseparable alliance. But Léon Blum was not to be overthrown at the first grapple. Though he was thirteen years younger, his brain was more cautious than the Southern head of Jaurès. An individualist to the degree of anarchy, he had further to travel. Not until three years later do we find explicit

¹ Léon Blum, *Conférence sur Jean Jaurès*.

evidence of his enrolment as a communicant of the collectivist tabernacle. Recalling his introduction to Jaurès, at the latter's tiny apartment in the Rue Madame, near Saint-Sulpice, he testified that "in 1896 I was already a Socialist." He belonged first to a group called *l'Unité socialiste*, which centred about the publishing house of Bellais-Péguy and included Charles Andler and Albert Thomas. In 1899 he joined the Socialist Party, and in 1905 the Second International.

The motives of his conversion may be judged from a passage in his lecture at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs. As he beheld it, "Socialism does not appeal to the baser instincts of man, but to his highest thoughts and feelings—love of justice, a sense of human solidarity and the spirit of sacrifice; sacrifice of egoistic appetites and interests to a collective ideal." It must be confessed that during his formative years capitalism in France was scarcely distinguished for high thoughts and feelings. When Léon was fifteen years old, Jules Grévy was compelled to resign as President because one of his relations was found to have been using the Élysée Palace as headquarters for a brisk traffic in Legion of Honour decorations. Five years later the Panama Scandal precipitated the ruin of thousands of investors, with revelations of bribery on an astronomical scale, involving the most respectable newspapers of France and numerous members of both houses of Parliament.

With Jaurès in the Chamber of Deputies as a Socialist, and Léon Blum reunited in friendship with

THE AUTHOR BEGINS

Lucien Herr, we behold three of the actors in a drama about to convulse Europe waiting off-stage, without their knowledge, for the rise of the curtain. On October 29, 1894, a Paris newspaper, *Libre Parole*, gave currency to a report that two weeks earlier a significant military arrest had taken place. This rumour, announced the Paris *Éclair* of the next day, had been confirmed. The *Libre Parole*, on November 1, could offer particulars. The crime alleged was betraying army secrets to a foreign government ; the place of confinement was Cherche-Midi ; and the prisoner was a Jew, Captain Alfred Dreyfus of the *État-Major-Général*. He had, it was declared, " made a full confession."

CHAPTER IV

L'AFFAIRE DREYFUS

IN August, 1894, Major Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy of the garrison at Rouen indited on onion-skin paper a *bordereau*, or memorandum, and posted it to Colonel von Schwarzkoppen, military attaché to the German Embassy in Paris. The proceedings of a court-martial held in December of the same year were quashed *sans renvoi*, on July 12, 1906, by the Cour de Cassation. Thus *l'Affaire Dreyfus*, or, in a single word, *l'Affaire*, consumed almost precisely twelve years. During that period it estranged friends, disrupted families and embroiled table, club, theatre and boulevard. It cast down one ministry after another, destroyed the Republican Party of Gambetta and Ferry, plunged the Gallic Church into disestablishment and brought France to the verge of revolution. One may add, without essential bathos, that it inspired the first of Léon Blum's two desertions of literature for militant Socialism. From beginning to end of the convulsion he was active as a subaltern. Only in the French Revolution and World War could he discern, after thirty-seven years, a parallel to its zenith of intensity—that is to say, the twenty months separating January 13, 1898, when Émile Zola published the letter *J'accuse*, from September 19, 1899, when Dreyfus was pardoned by President Loubet. The characteristic lineament of these shocks of collective passion, according to M. Blum, is a profound depreciation in the value of human life. "When

I recall the climax of *l'Affaire*," he wrote, following the death of Dreyfus, "the most potent of all its thronging memories is that for my friends and myself existence ceased to count. We would have sacrificed ourselves without hesitation or effort in behalf of what we thought to be truth and justice. Doubtless also, with more reluctance, we would have immolated the men who barred the road to justice and truth."¹

Until the rise of National Socialism under Adolf Hitler, the condemnation of Dreyfus marked the highest tide of modern anti-Semitism. The movement had its spring in Germany, largely as a consequence of the financial crisis of 1873. The ruthless exaction of the French indemnity had been avenged by a fury of speculation in Germany, and the resultant *Krach* was ascribed to Hebrew promoters. At once the crusade spread abroad, notably to Austria-Hungary and Russia. Last to be invaded was France. During 1886 Édouard Drumont launched the attack with a ribald memoir entitled *La France juive*; six years later he founded an anti-Semite newspaper, *Libre Parole*. He was equipped with a numerous following by the scandal of the Panama Canal Company, which had been incorporated in 1879 under the laws of France, with Ferdinand de Lesseps as president. Gigantic stock issues were floated. Construction began in 1882 and continued until 1887. Two years later the enterprise became bankrupt. The exposure of 1892 proved that its management had been signalized

¹ Léon Blum, *Souvenirs sur l'Affaire*, 1935.

by extravagance and corruption of legendary proportions. Involved was a trio of Mosaic entrepreneurs, two of whom fled the country.¹ Special umbrage was taken at the fact that in the French army five hundred Israelites had been commissioned as officers. The duel was invoked to cow them into resigning. There were meetings of Drumont and Captain Crémieu Foa, of the Marquis de Morès and Captain Mayer, who was killed. One of Captain Foa's seconds was Major Esterhazy, who, through the mediation of a gullible rabbi, turned his "chivalry" to profit by extracting doles from the Rothschilds. The most resented of these upstart officers was Alfred Dreyfus, first of his blood to trespass upon the shrine of the General Staff. He was born October 10, 1859, at Mulhouse, in Alsace, the third son of Raphaël Dreyfus, owner of prosperous spinning-mills. Having been graduated from the École Polytechnique, he prepared himself for the artillery arm with study at appropriate war colleges and service in the garrisons of Mans and Paris, from which he emerged in 1889 with the rank of *Capitaine en second*. Doggedly ambitious, he entered the École Supérieure de Guerre in 1890, and after two years stood ninth in its tests, a grade assuring his appointment to the *État-Major*.

The fiendish hap which betided him there

¹ As an intimate of one of them, Clemenceau thought it well to clear his skirts by fighting a duel. For this infraction of the penal code he was sentenced to prison. Guides at the Conciergerie point out proudly the narrow cell that caged the "Tiger."

demands review, since it forms one of the two great backgrounds overhanging Léon Blum's career. The particulars may well have been forgotten. They compose a masterpiece of logical surprise, flood and fall of plot, dramatic episode and suspense—as if life had determined to vindicate, in the *roman policier*, its ascendancy over human talent at its most fertile and adroit. Upon Léon Blum it stamped a redoubtable impression. He represented the author of *Faust* as projecting a Third Part, based on *l'Affaire*; and waxing indignant over an anti-Dreyfusard wrench of one of his saws, to the effect that a single injustice is better than public disorder.¹ Its ardours forced him at twenty-five into maturity. His style, often vestally tremulous, grew manly and imperturbable. He caught, too, the faint far rumble of a conviction that was to peal in his ears with the assassination of Jaurès and the onset of the World War—a conviction that on this planet of atrocities the rôle of critic is unworthy, and that of actor imperative. The sorrows of Dreyfus fired a train of passion which in due time would hurl the scholar from his desk to the forum of public life; impel the lover of solitude,² by force of will and thought, to become a leader of men; and devote the zealot of the consummate word to the barbarisms and ambiguities of politics. Ironically enough, it is more

¹ Léon Blum, *Nouvelles conversations de Goethe avec Eckermann*, June 7 and July 7, 1898.

² As recently as 1924, M. Blum remarked: "For thirty years I have done precisely the things for which I was least fitted. What I really love is solitude and books."

than possible that without this anti-Semitic cabal of 1894 a Jew would not in 1936 have made himself master of France.

We may start with the leading persons of the action. Grouped about Schwarzkoppen were the Italian military attaché, Colonel Panizzardi,¹ and two salaried spies, Esterhazy² and Colonel Henry, chief aide to the Intelligence Division of the French General Staff. On the other side were General Mercier, Minister of War ; General de Boisdeffre, head of the État-Major ; General Gonse, his first aide ; Colonel Sandherr, chief of the Intelligence Division ; an officer of the General Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel du Paty de Clam, who was to be charged with the prosecution of Dreyfus ; and another of the Intelligence Section, Colonel Marie-Georges Picquart, who was at first inactive in the case, but was destined to suffer and triumph as its paladin in gleaming armour. Needless to say, Schwarzkoppen's attentions were paid in kind by the French secret service, which bribed menials of the German Embassy to ransack its waste-paper baskets and fire-places for torn or partly burned evidence. In September, 1894, an agent named Brücker conveyed to Colonel Henry a letter unsigned and intact, on

¹ Owing principally to want of funds, Rome undertook little espionage in France. Schwarzkoppen shared with Panizzardi such communications as might interest the latter's Government.

² Born in 1847, he sprang from an illegitimate branch, settled for three generations in France, of a noble Hungarian house. Prior to joining the regular army he was an adventurer, serving in the Papal Guards and French Foreign Legion.

paper nearly transparent, which had been thieved from Schwarzkoppen's pigeon-hole in the porter's lodge. It was a schedule outlining a second and unrecovered missive. Detailed information was promised regarding a device for checking recoil in field-guns, the French programme of mobilization against Germany, recent artillery manœuvres, plans of an expedition then afoot for the conquest of Madagascar and the field artillery's manual of fire. On September 24 Colonel Henry submitted the memorandum to his superior officers.

There is small basis for supposing that these men were at first actuated by more sinister motives than stupidity and prejudice ; though later, when it appeared that the honour of the French army and Republic was involved, they stopped at nothing to fasten guilt upon a man by then known to be innocent. Even Colonel Henry can scarcely have recognized the *bordereau's* penmanship ; he would otherwise have suppressed a document so perilous to an accomplice and potentially to himself. During 1876 Esterhazy had served with Henry in the Intelligence Section. They were friends to the extent that the latter owed the former for sums borrowed. It is doubtful that one knew the other to be a German spy ; Schwarzkoppen concealed even from Panizzardi the identity of his informers. From a study of the epistle two conclusions were reached, both erroneous : first, that the writer was a member of the General Staff ; and second, that he was an artillery officer. With the field thus circumscribed, suspicion pointed necessarily to

Captain Dreyfus. Inquiry disclosed, it is true, that his habits were neither spendthrift nor debauched, that he enjoyed a private income of £1,200 a year, and that his wife, Lucie Hadamard, daughter of a Paris jeweller, had brought him a considerable dot. He should, therefore, have been proof against whatever temptations were offered by the pittance which Germany dealt to spies; Esterhazy's wage as an intelligencer was £80 a month. Dreyfus was an Alsatian émigré, and by that token presumably a patriot to the extreme of chauvinism. He had even been a Boulangist. Every objection was brushed airily aside on the ground of his race, his "fatality of type." The Norns had intervened with a tragic coincidence. Beyond dispute, a family likeness obtained between the authentic script of Dreyfus and that of the *bordereau*.¹ M. Gobert, expert at the Bank of France, saw discrepancies in the two exhibits. But recourse was had to Alphonse Bertillon, chief of the Identification Bureau at the Prefecture of Police. Unabashed by the circumstance that he was not a graphologist, this madman invented on the spot a system of his own, under which he pronounced both writings to be products of the same hand.

Captain Dreyfus was ordered to appear in mufti, on October 15, at the Ministry of War. Pretending an injury to his hand, Colonel du Paty prayed his colleague to write a missive in his stead, and dictated a letter almost word for word in the language of the *bordereau*. He calculated that the

¹ Théodore Reinach, *Histoire sommaire de l'Affaire Dreyfus*.

other, surprised in this fashion with his detected guilt, would break down and confess. In an adjoining room was a loaded revolver, so that the traitor might execute justice upon himself. Dreyfus dispatched the paragraphs with unruffled sangfroid, which was taken to be a portent less of innocence than superhuman effrontery. He was arrested and placed in solitary confinement at the army prison of Cherche-Midi. His court-martial, held in secret before a tribunal of seven officers, began on December 19. So wild and whirling was the effect of Bertillon's system that a judgment of "not proved" was on the cards. Thereupon Henry brought to light a second instalment of evidence, which became known as the *dossier*. Just what entries then composed this file remain uncertain; but the master item was a note from Schwarzkoppen to Panizzardi in which occurred the sentence: *J'ai vu ce canaille de D. . . . ; il m'a donné pour vous douze plans directeurs*. The document was unmistakably genuine; *canaille* was an habitual expression with Schwarzkoppen, and only a foreigner would have placed a masculine pronoun before a feminine substantive.¹ The flaw was that the initial "D" referred to an agent named Debois, who terrorized the German and Italian attachés by making scenes with them over money in the streets. But this was not known until years later. Revealed to the judges, but to neither Dreyfus nor his advocate, Edgard Demange, the *dossier* turned the scales. Confident of a propitious verdict, the defendant was thunder-

¹ The correct construction is *cette canaille*.

struck at hearing on December 22 that he was sentenced to military degradation and imprisonment for life in a fortified area. Then indeed he besought the pistol once proudly refused. It was withheld by Colonel Forzinetti, commandant of Cherche-Midi, who had come to doubt his captive's guilt.

The finding met with all but unanimous approval. Both Jaurès and Clemenceau grumbled because the spy had not been shot.¹ A new statute against treason was drafted hastily by Parliament. Had it been in force some weeks earlier, Dreyfus would have been executed. The German Embassy vowed a solemn oath, on its honour, that never had it so much as heard the name of Alfred Dreyfus. This chanced to be true. As it would have been sworn with equal orotundity if false, the disclaimer was cynically greeted. Note might have been taken of the fact, however, that Schwarzkoppen did not leave France. The etiquette of international courtesy enjoined that a diplomat found out in the practice of espionage should be transferred to another post. Upon the suicide of Colonel Henry, four years later, Schwarzkoppen at once quit the country. He was ready for flight on October 29, 1894, when the rumour was first printed that a spy had been taken. "I believe," he said to Panizzardi, "that my man has got himself nipped." After two days he was reassured by the published name of Dreyfus. "This is another matter," he told the Italian; "it is not my man."²

¹ Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*.

² Henri Casella, in *Le Siècle*, April 8 and May 24, 1898.



LÉON BLUM AT THE AGE OF EIGHT, AND HIS
BROTHERS

(Left to right, rear) : Lucien, Léon.



LUCIEN HERR
Intellectual Master of Léon Blum.

A few spectators were perturbed by the rites celebrated on January 5, 1895, at the Champs-de-Mars. Despite the *Libre Parole's* assurance that a confession had been made, the culprit affirmed his innocence with moving outcries when sentence was pronounced, when his sword was snapped, when facings and epaulettes were torn from his uniform, and when he was marched past a rabble howling for his death. Maurice Barrès "could not disguise the fear lest, after all, an innocent man might have been condemned."¹ On the same evening, at dinner, Alphonse Daudet had for guest Émile Zola, most discussed and read of French novelists. Returning from the ceremony, or festival—for such it was—young Léon Daudet pictured the scene with ferocious ecstasy. Though convinced of the Jew's crime, Zola was disgusted with the barbarity of the spectacle and the noisome transports of its chronicler.² This emotion, as yet unfertilized, was to bear historic fruit when three years had elapsed.

Thrust aboard ship, Dreyfus departed on February 21 from France, which he was not to revisit for four years and four months. His destination was the smallest of the Safety Islands, off the coast of French Guiana—a barren rock haunted by fever, lashed by tropic rains and scorched by the equatorial sun. Having been a leper colony, it was named the Île du Diable. His abode was a cabin twelve feet square; at the threshold watched a guard with whom he was forbidden to speak. From sunrise to

¹ Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, 1924.

² Daniel Halévy, *Luttes et Problèmes*, 1911.

sunset he was allowed to promenade upon a stony rectangle 200 yards long. To beat off insanity, he wrote a journal, reviewed his studies in mathematics and taught himself English. When a London gazette printed false news of his escape, he was subjected to the *double boucle*—a steel rack so designed that he could not move his legs without anguish. There, for twenty-four days and nights, he crouched amid vermin and ordure. Still more unkind was a palisade of stout boards, hurriedly erected, which shut off his view of the sea, pathway to honour and home. But already the mills of the gods were grinding unawares. Less than four months after Dreyfus landed on Devil's Island, Colonel Sandherr retired because of ill-health and Colonel Picquart, to the mortification of Henry, who coveted the post, became chief of Military Intelligence. And the prisoner's good angel would have it that during March, 1896, Henry should be absent from his desk, at the bedside of a relative. Thus it was possible for a very trump of evidence to fall directly into Picquart's hand. It was a *petit bleu*, or express letter, which Schwarzkoppen had written but not sent. He had torn it in fifty pieces and dropped them in a waste basket. It called for "detailed information on the pending subject," and was addressed, by name and street number, to Major Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy.

With the idea that he had stumbled on a second Dreyfus affair, Picquart acted with caution. He learned that Esterhazy was a wastrel and profligate, head over heels in debt, whose shifts had brought

him in peril of the law. An infantry officer, he had displayed peculiar zest for the artillery, borrowing its manuals and attending its exercises at his own cost. Several months were required for building a case strong enough to submit to General de Boisdeffre. On August 31 the Intelligence chief made a staggering discovery. Two letters of Esterhazy came into his possession. Tests of the handwriting proved that it was identical in every respect with that of the *bordereau*. Picquart sent for the *dossier*, which, with unbelievable negligence, had not been destroyed, and found that it signified exactly nothing. The initial "D," one of the most banal in the French tongue, might point to thousands of men. It followed with inescapable certitude that Dreyfus was innocent. Highly alarmed, the authorities of the General Staff made it their first care to pledge Picquart on his military oath to say nothing, and beyond all not to communicate with Matthieu Dreyfus, brother of the victim. Almost immediately the *Éclair*, on September 14, for the first time publicly disclosed the existence of the *dossier*, and did not scruple to alter its key sentence to read: "This animal of a Dreyfus is getting troublesome." Knowing the article to have been inspired by Colonel Henry, Picquart protested to General Gonse. "How does it concern you," thundered the latter, "if this Jew stays on Devil's Island?" His subordinate replied: "I cannot bear such a secret to the grave." From that instant he was marked for destruction. With fulsome flatteries he was sent on an inspection tour

of southern France, and by gradual stages was decoyed to Marseilles, to Tunis and finally its sanguinary outposts, from which it was believed he would never return alive.

While these events were germinating in the darkest crypts of the État-Major, others were piercing the soil without. Armed with a long purse, Matthieu Dreyfus rushed from Alsace to unmask the thugs who had ruined his brother. So impenetrable was the mystery in which the War Department shrouded itself that months passed before he gleaned two capital bits of rumour. President Faure was alleged to have told a friend that Dreyfus was convicted by a secret paper which was not communicated to the defence; and Foreign Minister Hanotaux was said to have remarked that the conclusive document, beyond the letter "D," specified no person by name. With mere gossip as sole ammunition, Matthieu sped his prime assault discreetly. A pamphlet written by Bernard Lazare and entitled *Une erreur judiciaire* appeared anonymously at Brussels on November 6, 1896. The General Staff towered unshaken, but this forlorn hope caught the eye of two principal men. Wickham Steed, European correspondent of the London *Times*, snuffed the first redolence of a scandal which a clever journalist might dilate to a stench in the nostrils of the world. Zola's instinct of revulsion at the commencement of the affair was changed to doubt; this, in turn, would grow to conviction with Lazare's second treatise, dealing with graphological discordances,

which was issued the next year.¹ Possessing uncanny resources of information, Lucien Herr had by now satisfied himself of Dreyfus' innocence, and was perhaps already musing that spear-head of Socialists and intellectuals, with Léon Blum as his lieutenant, which was to stand second to none as an agency of deliverance. Rounding off the year 1896, *Le Matin* on November 10 struck the War Ministry with consternation by publishing a facsimile of the *bordereau*. It had been obtained indirectly from one of the penmanship experts, Teyssonières, who kept a photostatic copy. "This time," Schwarzkoppen exclaimed to Panizzardi, "my man is caught; it is absolutely his handwriting."²

In May, 1897, Colonel Picquart, having at last penetrated the complot of the General Staff, obtained leave of absence through some sleight, returned to Paris and unfolded his secret in confidence to a friend named Leblois, an attorney. This fiery coal the lawyer hugged for two weeks in his bosom, and then disburdened himself, also in confidence, to Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, vice-president of the Senate and a patriot of Roman virtue. He had been a colleague of Gambetta, and was a descendant of the famous Charlotte of Goethe's *Werther*.³ Strict as to the letter of his word, Scheurer-Kestner proclaimed on all hands that he

¹ "Léon Blum said: 'I greatly admire Bernard Lazare, who had the courage to set the Dreyfus Affair going, and then, when success was assured, discreetly retired, leaving the glory to others.'"—Jules Renard, *Journal inédit*, May 17, 1899.

² Henri Casella, *supra*.

³ Dr. Bruno Weil, *Der Prozess des Hauptmanns Dreyfus*.

knew Dreyfus to be innocent, and would seek a revision of the process under which he was condemned. Through personal interviews with Jaurès, Clemenceau and Anatole France, Lucien Herr in the meantime persuaded them that Dreyfus had been the scapegoat of a conspiracy. Thanks to this preliminary work, the columns of Clemenceau's new quotidien, *Aurore*, were available the following January to Zola. Herr began also the formation of Dreyfusard groups throughout the capital, and assembled petition after petition, signed with the names of distinguished writers, artists and scholars, which were showered upon the Ministry of War. Léon Blum pledged himself to secure the adhesion of Maurice Barrès. But the latter was among those froward spirits who embrace a lost cause with passion and desert it on the first sign of victory. In proportion as Dreyfus' innocence became clear, Barrès grew certain of his guilt. What is more, he vented bitter scorn, in the *Echo de Paris*, upon those intellectuals who, without office or authority, presumed to exercise public powers. On behalf of his ancient intimates, Lucien Herr, in *La Revue Blanche*, bade him an eternal farewell. Not until seventeen years later, at the bier of Jaurès, did Blum and Barrès become reconciled.¹

The two currents running in favour of Dreyfus, within and outside the État-Major, were now to join. Hoping that the script would be identified, Matthieu struck upon the artifice of circulating

¹ Extending his hand, the novelist murmured: "Your grief is mine."—Léon Blum, *Conférence sur Jean Jaurès*.

thousands of replicas of the *bordereau*. One of these came under the glance of a banker named Castro, who sent a furtive message and whispered a name. Matthieu went to Scheurer-Kestner. "Is Esterhazy the man?" he pleaded. "He is the man," rejoined the Senator.¹ On November 15 Matthieu published a letter to the Minister of War denouncing Esterhazy as the writer of the *bordereau* and author of the treason which Alfred Dreyfus was expiating on the Île du Diable. Esterhazy dashed to the German Embassy, cocked a pistol and threatened to blow out his brains unless Schwarzkoppen announced that Dreyfus and not himself was guilty. The attaché put him out of the door. Soon rallying his wits, the Major reflected that the General Staff was involved too deeply to allow him to be sacrificed. Having addressed blackmailing notes to the proper quarters, he insolently demanded a court-martial. During the same month, Zola entered the field with three articles in *Figaro*. One was a eulogy of Scheurer-Kestner and another defended the "Syndicate of Treason," this being the epithet with which the opposition press branded Matthieu Dreyfus and his associates. The third was a polemic against anti-Semitism. After that, *Figaro* closed its pages to the author of *l'Assommoir*, *Germinal* and *La Terre*.

Thus dawned the *annus mirabilis* of 1898. Esterhazy had his trial, was acquitted, as he had foreseen, on January 11, and was escorted to his house by a multitude which shouted: *Vive l'armée!* and

¹ Théodore Reinach, *Histoire sommaire de l'Affaire Dreyfus*.

Vive le commandant Esterhazy! Just two days later, on January 13, at the moment when Picquart was flung into prison on a charge of conveying military information to a civilian, Zola published in the newspaper *Aurore* a letter to the President of France which has become immortal, from its opening words, under the title of *J'accuse*. It was a fearful indictment of those concerned in the prosecution of Dreyfus; with the intention of provoking a libel suit which would drag the affair into the sun, it stigmatized by name Lieutenant-Colonel du Paty de Clam and Generals Gonse, Boisdeffre and Mercier. But not even Zola's intuition as a novelist divined the presence of that baleful puppeteer, Colonel Henry, who from the darkness of his cavern manipulated every wire. The sensation was enormous. Copies of *Aurore* were snatched literally from the press; 300,000 copies were bought. General Mercier resigned, and was succeeded as Minister of War by Godefroy Cavaignac, son of the dictator of 1848. An epidemic of broils ensued; one of the most vehement was waged within the Socialist Party. Jaurès and Herr counselled the magnanimous principle that no injustice could lie outside the province of Socialist conscience. But a majority for which Millerand and Viviani gave tongue demurred that Zola was middle-class, and that Dreyfus was not only a bourgeois but a rich one, and a militarist to boot. At a meeting of the central committee Jules Guesde,¹ as if suffocated by this

¹ At this moment Jules-Mathieu-Basile Guesde (1845-1922) was Deputy for Lille and Jaurès' most formidable competitor for the Socialist leadership of France. Guesde was an apostle of revolutionary violence.

language, threw open a window and cried out that Zola's letter was "the greatest revolutionary deed of the century."¹ It was at length voted that the party would sustain the movement for revision.

Zola's trial began in Paris on February 6 and continued, with national uproar, for seventeen days. His publicized counsel were Fernand Labori and Albert Clemenceau; Léon Blum, as a volunteer of the legal staff, bestirred himself without fame in the wings.² An important episode was the first public mention of a third bit of evidence supplied by the resourceful Colonel Henry and nicknamed the *coup de massue*, or "knock-down blow." Zola was found guilty, with a sentence of a year in prison and a fine of 3000 francs. This judgment, appealed to the Cour de Cassation, was reversed on a technicality, and the suit was remanded to the Assize Court at Versailles. Fearing a second condemnation, which was duly pronounced on July 18, the novelist, advised by his attorneys, fled to England, where he remained nearly a year. He lived to see the pardon of Dreyfus, but not his final exoneration. On the morning of September 29, 1902, the heroic weaver of tales was found dead in his Paris house, having been asphyxiated by gases from a defective flue. He had just completed a novel, *Vérité*, which was built around incidents of the Dreyfus case.

¹ Jean Jaurès, *Conférence sur les deux méthodes*, at Lille, on November 26, 1900.

² Alexandre Zévaès, in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, June 6, 1936.

The new Minister of War, Cavaignac, determined to put an end once and for all to *l'Affaire Dreyfus*. In a speech before the Chamber, on July 27, 1898, he brought the *coup de massue* into full day. It purported to be a letter written in blue pencil by Panizzardi to Schwarzkoppen as follows: "I see that a Deputy proposes to interpellate the Government on the subject of Dreyfus. If Rome demands fresh explanations, I shall say that I never had connections with this Jew. If you are questioned, reply the same, for it would never do to have people know how far things have gone with him." The Minister was rewarded with universal applause and the title of "the new Boulanger." Ambitious to savour again, if possible, so delicious a triumph, he loosed a band of experts on *bordereau*, *dossier* and *coup de massue*. Their first discovery was that the "knock-down blow" was a forgery. Colonel Henry admitted proudly that the document was his handiwork, and justified himself with the excuse of "patriotic fraud." The next day, August 31, in the military prison of Mont Valérien, he cut his throat with a razor which had been left thoughtfully within reach. He killed himself not out of remorse over the wrong done to Dreyfus, that being, in his opinion, a trifling matter; but for fear that his wholesale traffic as a master-spy had come into view. Esterhazy stole away to England, where for twenty-five years, under the alias of "Voilemont," he dragged out an obscure and wretched existence. He died May 21, 1923, having long since confessed to the authorship of the

bordereau. Schwarzkoppen and Panizzardi paid their farewell calls at the Palais de l'Elysée. Colonel du Paty de Clam found himself on the retired list. General de Boisdeffre resigned August 30. Cavaignac followed his example a few days later. The Ministry of Henri Brisson staggered for three weeks and tumbled prostrate on October 25. The Cour de Cassation, on October 29, voted to entertain Mme Dreyfus' petition for a new trial.

Under scandalous circumstances, President Faure died suddenly on February 16, 1899. In his stead Parliament elected Émile Loubet, a revisionist. The Cour de Cassation, on June 3, ordered a new court-martial, to be held at Rennes, in Brittany. On the following day an insurrectionary demonstration was organized by anti-Dreyfusards. President Loubet, in his tribune at the race-course of Auteuil, was insulted by a fashionable mob and struck over the head with a cane. The proletarian journals exhorted their readers to stage a counter-demonstration on June 11. By multitudes they invaded the "patriotic" strongholds of the Champs-Élysées and Bois de Boulogne. Making one of his rare descents into the streets, Lucien Herr, with Léon Blum at his side, strode at the front of the procession. From the Pavillon d'Armenonville the marchers were assailed with glasses, bottles, stones and iron chairs. The victims of the onset were about to attack the resort, when Herr, who possessed the brawn of a blacksmith, took command of the passage-way and forbade them

to enter the gardens. Then, single-handed, he enabled the leader of the assault to depart unhurt. Later, in the Avenue de Bois, working-men were attacked by police. Many were wounded; jaws and skulls were broken. One gendarme, separated from his companions, was about to be lynched. Herr said simply: "Give me this man!" The ranks opened, and he restored the prisoner to his brigade. Nevertheless, he sent to Édouard Vaillant of the Chamber of Deputies a telegram describing instances of police brutality beheld by himself, Blum and others. The next day, under the shock of this *petit bleu*, the ministry of Charles Dupuy collapsed.¹

Dreyfus disembarked at Quiberon on July 1. He had been kept in such ignorance of his affairs that hours were required to persuade him that he did not owe his second hearing to General de Boisdeffre. While strolling along the quay at Rennes on the morning of August 14, Maître Labori was shot in the back by an unidentified assailant. The trial began August 17, and occupied three weeks. To the horror and derision of Europe, the judges, on September 9, handed down another verdict of guilty, to which was added the incoherent rider, "with extenuating circumstances." The sentence was reduced to ten years in the military prison at Rennes. President Loubet granted a pardon on September 19. A campaign for the legal and military rehabilitation of Dreyfus ensued. It was led by Clemenceau in the *Aurore* and by Jaurès in

¹ Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*.

La Petite République as well as the Chamber of Deputies. Not until seven years later did the Cour de Cassation finally abrogate the conviction of the first court-martial. Dreyfus was promoted to the rank of Major and nominated a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. In contrast to this modest atonement were the rewards which accrued to his champions. Clemenceau, in 1906, became Prime Minister of France. Jaurès was recognized as the undisputed chieftain of French Socialism ; Guesde, out of hatred for his rival, had committed the blunder of growing lukewarm in behalf of Dreyfus. Picquart ascended from prison and disgrace as a Brigadier-General ; he was Minister of War in Clemenceau's first cabinet. General Picquart died January 19, 1914, in the odour of military sanctity, having sought for many years to forget, and make others forget likewise, that there had been a Dreyfus Affair. Of all possible *non sequiturs*, Léon Blum emerged from the twelve-year turmoil as a dramatic critic. Major Dreyfus served ten months in the army, and resigned during July, 1907. Zola's body, on June 4, 1908, was translated to the Panthéon. Riding in the *cortège*, Dreyfus was twice shot at and wounded in the shoulder by a journalist, who was acquitted of attempted homicide by a jury. At the beginning of the World War, Dreyfus returned to military duty ; in 1918 he was advanced to Lieutenant-Colonel and made an Officer of the Legion of Honour. Grown almost blind, he died at his Paris residence on July 12, 1935. It is a melancholy reflection that this long and perilous campaign, on

behalf of eventful issues, was fought by men to whom the personality of Alfred Dreyfus was antipathetic. Cerebral and loquacious, his supporters were intolerant of a figure so naïve, so wordless. He was indelibly a soldier; that is, as they conceived it, a thrall of caste, a tool of carnage. Pronounced, so to speak, above his very hearse, M. Blum's final assessment tingles with harmonics of reproach and distaste :

“Some weeks after the court-martial at Rennes, Félix Vallotton published a cartoon which I still can see. Grave and sombre, Captain Dreyfus was dancing a pair of happy tots upon his knees. But he averted his eyes when the smaller begged : ‘Daddy, a story !’ A story? Captain Dreyfus was incapable at that time of recounting his own. He had not understood it; he did not know it. He died after thirty years of voluntary effacement—he whose name had filled the world, and whom it had very likely forgotten. Reserved and serious, he possessed nothing of the hero save a mute and indomitable courage. As he was thoroughly simple, he wanted swagger, prestige, oratory. At the bar of his judges he never found the ‘cry of innocence.’ Throughout the letters written to his wife from Devil’s Island, one fails to surprise the least impulse of revolt. The sense of hierarchy was so powerful in him that he relied on his chiefs for acknowledgment and reparation of their fearful blunder; that confidence was his support. He performed all his duties loyally. Even face to face with his wife and

L'AFFAIRE DREYFUS

brother Matthieu, during the inquiry conducted by Colonel du Paty de Clam, he observed a stoic reticence. His military greatness was formed of servitude."¹

¹ Léon Blum, *Souvenirs sur l'Affaire*.

CHAPTER V

CROSSROADS

IN the jargon of evolution, M. Blum's career as social reformer and literary æsthete has been governed by cataclysm rather than continuity. His employments, instead of running abreast, form a cycle of recurrent phases. Not that his pen lags for an hour. But he has oscillated between *précieux* and belligerent with a sharpness inviting us to reckon each moment of bob and recoil. The opening term, one of scholarship, began May 15, 1891, and entered its decline late in 1897, when he joined the Dreyfusard staff. A progressing concern with public affairs notates the seven years following ; their end, in 1905, synchronized with the abolition of his column of book and theatre reports in the journal *l'Humanité*. Another period of cultural authorship, enduring nine years, concluded in July, 1914, with the publication of *Stendhal et le Beylisme*, which registered the last stand of the artist against the missionary. His preface to its second edition illustrates the finality of that surrender. "In proffering my book once more to the public," he mused during 1930, "I experience an unfeigned and singular emotion. Is it really by me ? It is by a ' me ' connected intimately with myself, whom I recognize with difficulty. It seems, in fact, to disinter the posthumous work of a dead brother." So ruinous was the downfall of the savant that his writings for twenty-two years, with the exception of *La Réforme gouvernementale*, a manual of "parlia-

mentary hygiene," have ministered almost exclusively to proletarian unction. His several changes of skin would appear enigmatic had he not furnished a gloss. "I ceased to be a militant," explains he, "when the unity of the Socialist Party was established. I returned to militancy at the instant when it was compromised."¹ The dates support this clue. It was in 1905 that the hostile sects of France were reconciled under the leadership of Jaurès. In July, 1914, the outbreak of the World War split the Second International asunder.

During 1895, a twelvemonth of anxious beginnings at the Conseil d'État, his output shrank to three articles. One was a panegyric of Anatole France, in *La Revue Blanche*; another, in *Le Mercure de France*, celebrated the playwright Jules Renard. But 1896, the year of his introduction to Jaurès and marriage with Mile Bloch, rejoiced beside in his advancement, at the age of twenty-four, to the seat of literary editor of *La Revue Blanche*. Such was the momentum of this new charger that for three and a half years he could not dismount, though the period embraced the climax of the Dreyfus Affair and not a few episodes in which the reviewer was personally active, such as Zola's trial and the *sac du Pavillon d'Armenonville*. He compiled some fifty instalments of opinion, assessing thrice that number of newborn volumes. Most of these infants having perished at birth, the hastiest of glances will suffice. On the eve of his repulse by Maurice Barrès, the young editor pronounced *Le Roman de l'Énergie nationale* to

¹ Louis Lévy, *Comment ils sont devenus socialistes*.

be "the most important event in French letters for twenty-five years."¹ The publication of Zola's *Paris*, ten weeks after *J'accuse*, evoked a mention of his "late exploit" and a eulogy of realism as "the only genuine idealism; it is life itself; it is faith in beauty and justice; it is valiant will to forge the better man, the better world."² Starting up ablaze from Clemenceau's first novel, the critic protested that *Les plus forts* had inspired "the rarest and loftiest of joys, that of reading a book and finding a man."³ This epoch witnessed also M. Blum's earliest bow as a reviewer of drama. Romain Coolus presented at Les Escholiers⁴ his comedy in four acts, *l'Enfant malade*. Since M. Coolus was theatrical critic of *La Revue Blanche*, its literary editor was drafted for a report of the *répétition générale*. Taking into account the Olympian assurance thereafter to be his in the playhouse, something jocular attaches to his uncertainty on this strange and ticklish veldt. The rites owed to a colleague were dutifully performed, but other exposition was evaded on the ground that it would spoil the pleasure of readers of the drama, which began as a serial in that very issue. A gully of space was yet to be filled. Thankfully he grasped at a pair of topics eminent for safety—the myopia of subventioned theatres, which had scorned *l'Enfant malade*; and the distinction of its

¹ *La Revue Blanche*, November 15, 1897.

² *Idem*, April 1, 1898.

³ *Idem*, April 15, 1898.

⁴ A minor odéon in Paris, christened after Raymond and Marie-Louise Escholier, collaborating novelists.

cast. Thirteen lines were needed for his compliments to a single thespian, Mlle Marthe Mellot.¹ Some years later, if in a prodigal mood, he would fling one line and no more to the sovereign Lucien Guitry. When the play was issued in book form and the critic once more was ensconced securely in his own speciality, he dignified the work with a minute and authoritative analysis.²

New Year's Day, 1900, should be underscored on the calendar of Léon Blum's development. In *La Revue Blanche* of that date he lashed out from his niche at the back of the periodical into its front pages with an article *Sur le Congrès socialiste*. It was his advent in a department fated to absorb more than twenty years of his activity as a writer—that of Socialist journalism. The beliefs which sprang from his conversion in 1896, which had been watered by intimacy with Jaurès and Herr, and had blossomed more than once into action, now at last twined about his pen. The occasion, though he could scarcely have suspected this fact, was the earliest step towards that coalition of the masses which one day would entrust him with the rule of France. Despite its collectivist theology, Gallic Socialism had produced an exorbitant quota of individualists not only rugged but infuriate. There were dozens of parochial messiahs, each with his band of disciples. At the instance of Jaurès, an attempt was made to compose the jarring sects into a national and disciplined church.

¹ *La Revue Blanche*, June 15, 1897.

² *Idem*, August 1, 1897.

The congregations of French Socialism gathered on December 3, 1899, at the Gymnase Japy, in Paris, for their first general synod. Eight hundred delegates represented numerous autonomous groups and five powerful denominations—the French Labour Party, commanded by Guesde ; the Socialist Revolutionary Party, formerly the Blanquists,¹ led by Vaillant ;² the Labour-Socialist Revolutionary Party, captained by Allemane ; the Federation of Socialist Workers, headed by Brousse ;³ and the Confederation of Independent Socialists, guided by Jaurès and Viviani. The dominant figures were Guesde, Allemane and Jaurès, according to M. Blum, who penned lively sketches of these major prophets. With his body arched and taut, with floating raven tresses, Guesde tilted his head backwards until “ he appeared to launch his discourses vertically.” Allemane pattered about the rostrum with tiny steps ; the gestures of a small, pale hand “ seemed to choose the nicest word, the subtlest reason.” As for Jaurès, “ never had his friends seen

¹ After Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), whose rebellious enterprises caused him to be sentenced twice to life imprisonment and once to death. He passed upwards of forty years in jail.

² Édouard Vaillant (1840–1915). A leader of the Paris Commune, he was condemned to die, but escaped to England. He returned under amnesty in 1879. From 1893 he was a member of the Chamber of Deputies ; he was the perennial Socialist candidate for the presidency of the Republic.

³ Paul-Louis-Marie Brousse, born in 1844, was also a Communard, and for many years a refugee in Spain and Switzerland. Having lost faith in violence, he organized, after re-entering France, the *Parti possibiliste*, which proposed a transformation of society without the use of force.

him more elevated and noble" ; his twenty-minute address on the Millerand incident " equalled the finest classical orations " ; and his style, terse and pithy, " was enriched, not blemished, by the music of his lyricism." After twelve stormy sessions, the congress adopted the principle of unity, and voted to meet annually, establish a permanent committee and exert moral suasion upon its newspapers and elected representatives. In his enthusiasm, the reporter allowed himself to predict that the entente would prove permanent. It lasted eight months. The second general congress, to which he was a delegate, witnessed the scandal of an affray between two brethren, one of whom was slashed across the hand with a knife. Thereupon Guesde and his retinue, the largest of the factions, walked out. At the third convention, in 1901, it was the Blanquists who seceded.¹

This article was the shadow cast by an imminent event. Two weeks later, on January 15, 1900, *La Revue Blanche* printed M. Blum's farewell instalment as literary editor. His desk was inherited on February 1 by André Gide. On April 1 the periodical published a dissertation by Léon Blum on *l'Article 7*, an historical review of one section of a law proposed in 1879 by Jules Ferry relative to the secularization of higher education. With this essay his career as a magazine contributor came virtually to an end.² The causes for his retirement seem to

¹ Alexandre Zévaès, *le Socialisme en France*, 1908.

² *La Revue Blanche* was absorbed in 1903 by *La Revue*, which two years later became *La Revue Mondiale*. It flourished until 1935.

have been two. In the first place, no doubt to his own astonishment, he found himself suddenly immersed in the publishing business. He was indebted for this occupation to the bankruptcy of a poet—an occurrence, I am informed, neither rare nor usually so consequential. But the rhymer in the case was Charles-Pierre Péguy, most brilliant of Lucien Herr's protégés at the École Normale and one of the most combative of his aides in the Dreyfusard militia. Born in 1873, Péguy was simultaneously a fervent Socialist and a devout Roman Catholic. His life-work was a gargantuan drama of verse and prose, in three sections of eight parts and twenty-four acts, entitled *Jeanne d'Arc*. In 1914 he refused a captaincy in order to march afoot with his men. While leading a company into action, he was killed on the first day of the Battle of the Marne. According to Professor Andler, he was a hero and a man of genius, but scarcely a saint. Péguy married a young woman with a dot of 30,000 francs, which he invested in a printshop for the publication of his own works. In a short time he not only dissipated his wife's portion but fell in danger of legal prosecution. Herr dashed to the rescue—a blunder which was to bring down upon him the poet's ungrateful resentment and the loss of his own small patrimony of £1200. He reorganized the printshop in 1898, under the style of *la Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition*, with offices at No. 17 Rue Cujas; 750 shares of stock were issued at £4 each. Two hundred were assigned to Péguy for his interest in the firm, which consisted of debts and unsaleable

books. The remaining shares were purchased by Herr or sold by him to friends. As Léon Blum became a director of the company, he was doubtless among the purchasers of stock. He joined also its contributing board of intellectuals, recruited by Herr, who without thought of advances or royalties flooded his presses with manuscripts on social and scientific themes, many of which had lasting worth.¹ M. Blum's offering was a brochure, substantial and precise, on labour and Socialist congresses held in France since 1876. With Mario Roques, he gradually assumed responsibility as executive editor for the new publishing house ; one of his cares, self-imposed and unsalaried, was to read every proof. By 1900 these tasks were devouring most of his spare time. In that year the enterprise suffered the first of two shocks which plunged it into disaster. On account of his previous failure, the stockholders had insisted that Péguy be excluded from the management. At first he acknowledged the justice of this arrangement ; but in his dour peasant's imagination a sense of having been ejected from his own shop expanded to grievance and then fury. He filed suit for the cash value of his shares, which had been presented chiefly as an alms. Under the

¹ Among these were a *Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine*, edited by P. Caron, H. Bourgin, G. Brière and Ph. Sagnac ; a *Répertoire méthodique de l'Histoire moderne et contemporaine de la France*, compiled by Caron and Brière ; and a *Catalogue bibliographique de Sciences sociales*, which was published in November, 1899. The Société des Textes Français Modernes, which was to achieve brilliant success, issued its first appeals from the premises in the Rue Cujas.

terms of a contract far too liberal, judgment was given in his favour. The undertaking might have weathered this gust ; in April, 1902, Herr reported that its arrears were in process of liquidation. A few weeks afterwards one of the employees absconded to America with all the fluid assets. The committee of scholars had employed a " practical man " to direct their mercantile affairs. From beyond the Atlantic he mocked at his victims, being apprized that no funds remained with which to guarantee the cost of his extradition. M. Blum lost his investment. Lucien Herr was compelled in his old age to moil as a publisher's hack ; he was entangled in debts he was never able to pay, and which as long as he lived harassed that proud and scrupulous conscience.¹

The second motive for M. Blum's resignation as literary editor was not, as is generally presumed, a commission from the Société des Études Juives to supply a French version of the *Contra Apionem* of Flavius Josephus. This, the seventh volume of a " new and scientific " translation of the Hebrew annalist's complete works, is catalogued among the Prime Minister's books at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.² But its minute apparatus of

¹ Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*.

² Léon Blum, *Flavius Josèphe contre Apion* (1902), after the text annotated and determined by Théodore Reinach. A second edition was published in 1930 under the auspices of the Collection des Universités de France. The original treatise is for scholars golden in that it preserves a quantity of citations from ancient authors whose very names, in some instances, would otherwise be lost.

textual criticism is obviously the feat not merely of a Hellenic student but a Hellenic specialist. On the title-page of the second edition the translator is identified as *agrégé des lettres* and professor at the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly in Paris ; yet I had unearthed no hint that M. Blum was ever engaged in teaching. Beyond all else, the *timbre* of its style differs from the tone of his other writings as viola from violin. It was therefore necessary to postulate a mathematical absurdity—the existence of a second Léon Blum, a contemporary of the statesman, and like him a Parisian, a man of letters and a devotee of Greek culture. The hypothesis was unconfirmed by any available book of reference ; the chance of its truth, under the laws of probability, was infinitely remote. True enough, M. Blum's reverence for the ambiguous personality of Josephus must be less than prostrate. But what could be more plausible than to conceive that, fresh from the Dreyfus case, he had been attracted by an illustrious Jew's philippic against the noisiest anti-Semite agitator of classic times ?¹ Nevertheless, in response to an inquiry, Professor Isadore Lévy of the Collège de France, who completed the notes to the second edition after the death of Théodore Reinach, resolved the

¹ A polygraph and Homeric commentator of renown, Apion, in his writings assailed the character and holy records of Israel ; he presided over a delegation sent from Alexandria to Rome for the purpose of inveighing against the Hebrews. His adversary before Caligula was the immortal Philo. Apion settled in the western metropolis and taught rhetoric until the reign of Claudius. In his *Αἰγυπτιακά* the tale of Androcles and the Lion makes its first known appearance.

mystery as follows : " Léon Blum, translator of the *Contre Apion*, has no connection with the Président du Conseil. The former is a humanist and the author of polished disputations in the form of Greek and Latin studies. He taught for several years at the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly. He is somewhat older than the other Léon Blum, who is himself a distinguished belletrist, but who never entered the field of education." To which Principal A. Clermond of the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly adds these particulars : " The Premier's homonym professed the humanities at this institution from 1906 to his retirement in 1931 and served during 1923 as technical assistant to Léon Bérard, Minister of Public Instruction, in the latter's reform of secondary schools." The unlucky classicist has written numerous articles on educational topics for magazines like *La Revue de Paris* and *La Revue des Deux Mondes* ; they, too, in the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale, are generally attributed to the Prime Minister.

Probably the capital ground for his departure from *La Revue Blanche* was a feeling, sooner or later inevitable to critics, that after celebrating so many books of other men the time had come for hazarding one of his own. Even in the first essays there were passages which, in his fond opinion, merited preservation—the rhapsody to ill-health, for instance, with variations on the theme, " Do you love me ? " of ten-year-old Mozart ; the censure of Renan for the chronic fright into which he was thrown by the Paris Commune ; or the tribute to Latin as a moral

force, with Michelet's testimony that the grave, ample tongue of Virgil inspired him with nausea for everything mean and abject. Claims to survival were pressed also by the recent disquisitions on Barrès, France, Renard and Zola ; the two reviews of *l'Enfant malade*, and especially the report on the Socialist congress of 1899. But how compel into an artistic whole such a miscellany of dramatic and literary criticism, philology, biography and politics ? With a flash of inspiration, M. Blum recalled one of the most felicitous of German classics—a tome the unity of which is undeniable, but whose matter is so various that it is likely to juxtapose Kant's hypothetical imperative and the talent of elephants as stage performers, the Simplon tunnel and the polarization of light, the genius of Erasmus and the game of whist, Napoleon on St. Helena and Benjamin Franklin's kite, or the tragedies of Euripides and the vogue of apes and parrots at Teutonic courts. The allusion, needless to say, is to Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe*.¹ Why not pretend, M. Blum asked himself, that these worthies remained alive—though the poet would be 152 years old and his interlocutor 109—and had continued into the present their excursive and fascinating dialogues ? The solution was as perilous as it was brilliant. It imposed upon a French journalist still in his twenties the sublime audacity of stepping, as it were, within "Europe's sagest head." M. Blum was much

¹ Johann Peter Eckermann (1792–1854) was librarian to the Duchess of Weimar and recorded in three volumes Goethe's colloquies with himself between 1823 and 1832.

concerned as to the propriety of signing his book¹—that is, whether he should be guilty of the impertinence of setting his name on the same cover with that of Goethe. “Why not?” Jules Renard reassured him. “Your insolence is not in signing the work, but in having had the notion of writing it.”² Victory alone could justify such arrogance. The triumph was complete. Though the *Gespräche* abound in allusions to French politics, warfare and letters, Goethe might have been startled to discover that in his patriarchal age he had become to all intents and purposes a Frenchman, and that he had been transformed not merely into a Socialist but a partisan of Jaurès. One is tempted to recall the poet’s conviction that the French Revolution was a denial of law and order, and the famous anecdote wherein, to the wrath of Beethoven, he stepped into the gutter and doffed his bonnet when a troop of Habsburgs minced past. But the wiseacre of Weimar need not have disowned the sapience of judgment, the encyclopædic curiosity, the intellectual energy and passion, which distinguish his imitator’s volume.

As in the *Gespräche*, each conversation is headed by a date of month and year, ranging from July 8, 1897, to September 30, 1900. I am not sure whether these figures denote the actual time of composition

¹ Léon Blum, *Nouvelles conversations de Goethe avec Eckermann*, 1901. Although his first book cites or recasts many of his previous articles, the major portion of its 316 pages consists of fresh matter.

² *Journal inédit*, March 14, 1901.

or were arbitrarily affixed. The internal evidence is that both procedures were employed. Nothing could surpass the effortless confidence of the opening chat, which begins, without apology or explanation, as follows : " This morning Goethe received a visit from a young man who had done excellently in his studies at Leipzig, had toured England and France, and spent several terms at Oxford. He had been presented to Goethe by a young Englishman, Mr. W——, who came to Weimar last year, and fancies that he cut here a mostly lively dash. ' I am much pleased with this young man,' Goethe said to me." From this starting-point, the aged poet launches into the midst of his reasons for always refusing to recommend untried authors to publishers. Throughout the book difficulties as to locale are managed with skill. A travelling company plays *l'Enfante malade* at Weimar, and Goethe rushes off for Paris to watch with his own eyes the first general convention of the Socialists of France. There is need to skim only a few of the trenchant pronouncements made to flood from his lips upon innumerable topics under the sun—the iniquity of modern doctors, who, in their greed for gain and lack of scientific spirit, " resemble more than one thinks the physicians of Molière " ; a suggestion that the man of genius may not have been the author of *The Jungle Books* but Kipling's father, curator of an art gallery in India and a being of superlative imagination, who invented animal stories for the amusement of his small son ; the homage, unexpected from a Frenchman, to Prince Bismarck, of whom it is declared that

"no one submits more piously than this brutal master of history to the laws and necessities of reality"; the consolations to be had from astronomy—"I have never understood Pascal's tragic terror before the starry heavens"; and the analysis of dramatic writing as differing from all other forms of literature in that "it is the art of creating situations and disposing them in just and exact order." There are two instalments, worded with a vigour that may reflect some personal grievance, upon the obligation of talented youths to flee as early as possible from the toils of their families. On another occasion, speaking of a recent novel, Goethe exclaims: "An autobiography! Again an autobiography! And the writer is only twenty-five. Do these young people no longer know what imagination is?" Reference is frequently made to American and English authors or thinkers, such as Poe, Emerson, Newton, Swift, Walter Scott, Shelley, Carlyle, Darwin, Robert Browning and Dickens.

Three at least of the book's episodes demand a pause of somewhat greater length. The first, an account of a meeting with Verlaine, bears every mark of having been drawn from M. Blum's personal experience. The second is an imaginative disclosure of a continuation of *Faust*. In the third, M. Blum leaves the rôle of fictionist for that of logician, and describes, through Goethe's mouth, the reaction of his head, as opposed to his heart, in the Dreyfus Affair. Ten years previously, the poet was alleged to narrate, he was invited to a cabaret

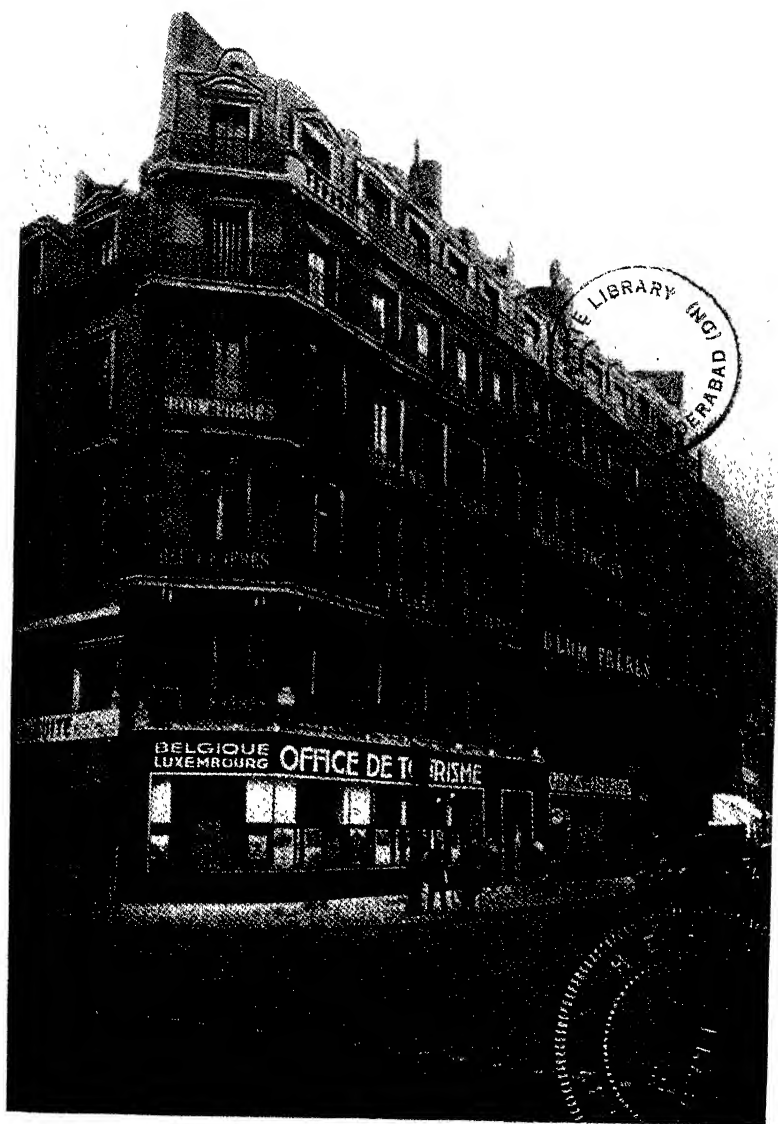
in Montmartre. "It was Verlaine who received me. Before taking my hand, he bowed with a sort of tranquil consideration. I have never forgotten the royalty of that welcome." The old master, with spectacles fixed too low upon his nose, read his latest verses in a dull and hesitant voice. At times confused, he skipped a stanza or a page. Begged to recite from memory some of his earlier lyrics, he complied with obvious effort, halting now and then till one of the auditors supplied a phrase or line which he had forgotten. "But I cannot recollect having been more vividly moved by poetry." His forehead was bald and spacious, and his countenance was so noble as to bring to mind "the bust of some great ancient, a Solon or Socrates, with an identical flame in the dead eyes."¹

On the morning of July 7, 1898, Eckermann finds Goethe at his desk in a rapture of solemn exaltation. He has become persuaded that he must write a Third Part of *Faust*. How slowly, he meditates aloud, does mankind raise itself to the level of certain ideas so imperatively true that they should stamp themselves instantly upon every thoughtful mind! The French Revolution made known a series of political and moral principles which universal reason no longer debates. Is it not singular that their existence was not suspected by a Rabelais, a Pascal? Suddenly, at an appointed hour of fate, it seems as if human conscience acquires a new sense. Goethe confesses that he himself was blind, in permitting Faust, at the conclusion of the

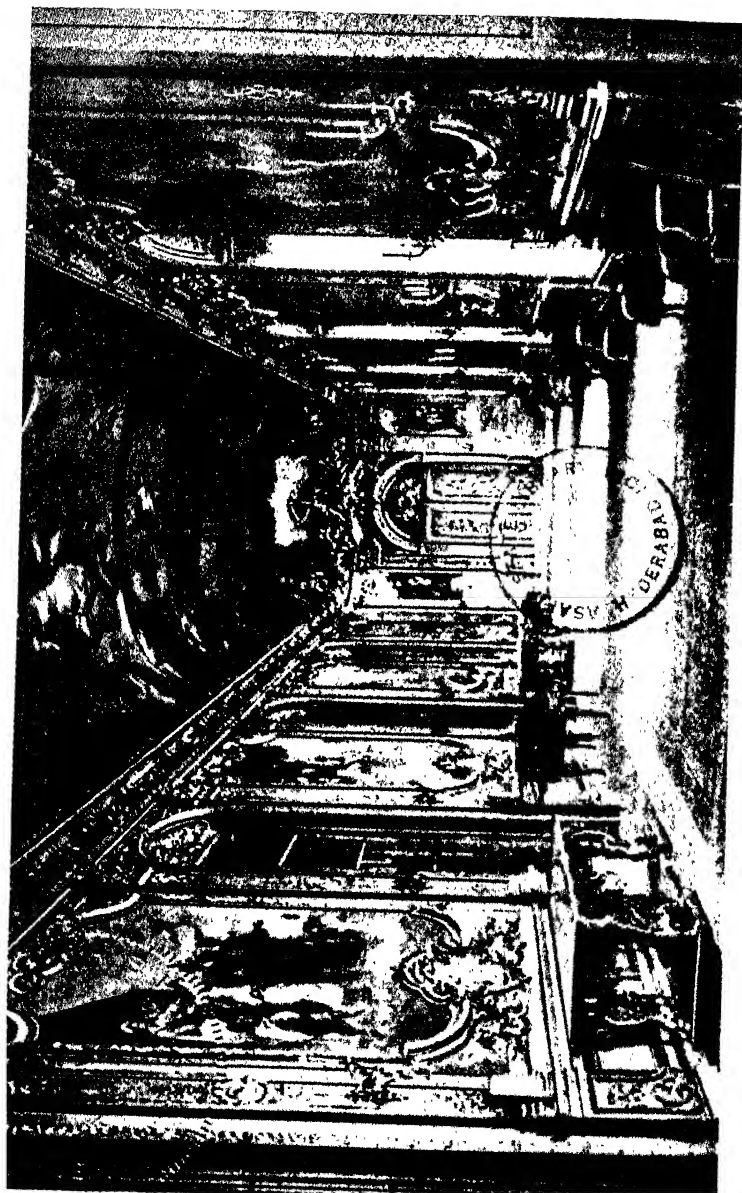
¹ *Nouvelles conversations*, September 18, 1898.

play, to satisfy himself with resettling a starving people on new land, there to flourish in liberty and prosperity. His own conscience has gained a new sense, thanks to the reflection that men exist who lack bread, and that other men eat bread for which they give no return of labour. Philanthropy, altruism from above, no longer suffice. The whole scheme of things must be dismantled and recast, so as to inaugurate a reign of social justice.¹ For this heroic exploit let Faust be summoned from the grave, and restored to the full vigour of youth ! Let him reject fortune, power and even love—for Marguerite, reanimated as a devout, sensible and bourgeois damsel, refuses to believe in his mission. The new Faust is a Frenchman, a member of the Chamber of Deputies and a Socialist agitator, magnetic and eloquent. He believes that mankind is by nature generous and upright, and addresses himself not to its passions but its reason. He aspires to instruct and convince. Abhorring bloodshed, he plans a revolution that will be pacific and fraternal. In brief, he is a second Jaurès. But Mephistopheles has likewise become a Socialist leader ; in his character of the spirit which strives eternally to bring evil out of virtue, he is a Guesdist—that is, in terms of the present, a Communist. He inflames the working-class to sanguinary riots.

¹ As one of the founders of evolution, the real Goethe, one fears, would have protested that by social justice M. Blum unwittingly meant another form of social injustice—that is to say, organized favouritism in behalf of the masses, with the hope of exempting them from the processes of natural selection.



BUSINESS SEAT OF THE BLUM FAMILY
No. 14, Rue du Quatre Septembre, Paris



THE GOLDEN GALLERY, BANK OF FRANCE

The struggle between the *deux méthodes* attains its climax in a situation analogous to the Dreyfus case —“but you can imagine this development without difficulty; history furnishes all the elements.” Goethe refuses to inform the quivering Eckermann whether Faust will succeed or fail, but lets drop a hint that he is writing dramatic poetry and not propaganda. With this one outburst the subject is dropped; some 200 pages of the book remain, but we hear nothing more of the new Third Part of *Faust*.

Whether or not by coincidence, the talk in which Goethe speaks his mind on *l’Affaire Dreyfus* and the Jewish problem in general is dated April 11, 1899, precisely two months before M. Blum was to risk bodily harm by marching at the head of the proletarian demonstration of June 11. The proximity of the two disclosures emphasizes his remarkable duality of temperament, which has not escaped previous eyes.¹ In one capacity he was the impetuous man of action, willing, as he averred, to die in a just cause. In the other, at almost the same instant, he was the aloof, cerebral observer, analysing implacably the frailties of that very cause. Eckermann reports that three Jewish officers have resigned from the French army on account of insults offered by their comrades, and is scandalized to discover that Goethe fails to share his indignation. “In Germany,” remarks the

¹ “He is at once decadent and prophet, disillusioned and inspired, a man of pleasure with the works of an apostle.”—*La Revue Universelle*, June 1, 1924.

poet, "Jews are forbidden by law to become military officers, and I do not see that their race is less prosperous and powerful." Every functionary, civil or military, has chosen that career of his own free will ; he has therefore no right to be astonished at whatever befalls him. The officers who have now resigned doubtless in former days thought it the most natural thing in the world that they should be flattered, if they had fine horses to lend or influence at the ministry. They should regard it as equally natural when public opinion turns against them. "If these gentlemen wished to be esteemed according to their individual merit, they should have chosen a different environment and another profession."

Too many Jews, continues Goethe—or, rather, M. Blum, himself for twenty-four years a civil servant—have precipitated themselves at once into public office, though the condition of a functionary adapts itself poorly to their racial characteristics. Lofty talents are exacted by commerce, industry and all pursuits wherein a man must depend upon himself alone. They are of no use to the bureaucrat, military or civil, for whose success are needed the middle virtues of accuracy, obedience and humility. "Let us consequently rejoice for these young Jews," exclaims Goethe, "if through wicked acts and despicable passions they are restored to the true path. Their inborn nature will be protected ; they will know the joy of independence which a faulty social system most often refuses to superior beings." The Jew must not forget the dominant rôle for

which fate has cast him in the subversion of the present order and its replacement by a nobler one. The spirit of Socialism is precisely that of ancient Israel. The Jew has the religion of justice, as the Positivists had that of fact and Renan that of science. The Old Testament says "a just man" and the New Testament "a good man." If Christ preached charity, Jehovah taught justice. "No, my friend," Goethe concludes, "it was not through an oversight of Providence that Lassalle and Marx were Jews."¹

But the son of Abraham responsible for this defiant utterance was even then preparing to turn his back, as he thought forever, upon the New Jerusalem's counter-scarps of amethyst and chryso-prase. So near and certain was the advent of the millennium that his own humble assistance would no longer be required. The Cour de Cassation in 1904 agreed to review the Dreyfus case, and none could doubt that the result would be vindication. During the same year, at a congress in Rouen, M. Blum delivered his first address as a Socialist. It was a plea for the fusion of all labour and collectivist denominations into a single front. In April, 1905, at Paris, Guesdists, Jaurists, Blanquists and Possibilists did at length assort themselves into the *Parti socialiste unifié*, which promptly became the

¹ The Prime Minister has frankly acknowledged the Messianic fixation that haunts his race. "The essence of Jewish thought lies in its gift for the ideal reconstruction of the world."—Léon Blum, *Au Théâtre : réflexions critiques*, second series.

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French section of the Second International. The forces of light had predominated over the powers of darkness, for at the head of the coalition stood the humane, the pacific, the republican Jaurès. Under his leadership the movement could be relied on to forsake proletarian violence, as taught by Marx, a subject of royalist Germany; and follow the bloodless, constitutional path befitting a democratic nation. Surely the worker, the peasant and the small bourgeois could not much longer defer a step so easy and simple, so transcendently to their own advantage, as that of combining into an electoral majority; and thus, under legal forms, without firing a shot, assume control of the government. Was not all for the best in the best of all possible worlds? Léon Blum in 1906 rejected, as he had declined four years earlier, the proposal of Jaurès that he enter politics as a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies.¹ In a sort of waggish rebound to the diametric opposite of militancy, he became instead the cynosure of female clubs and literary teas. Possessing highly articulate opinions on every subject, he grew among sophisticates into popular demand as a lecturer. During this phase he acquired lasting repute as a dilettante and bohemian—an error destined in 1936 to furnish a shock of surprise to friends and enemies both.

¹ Louis Lévy, *Comment ils sont devenus socialistes*.

CHAPTER VI

RACE OF HERDER

NO practitioner of expertise has deemed so inordinately of his function as Léon Blum. An occasional colleague has boasted the parity of his guild with the arts which it assesses and instructs. It remained for the French craftsman, thirty-six years before he himself achieved power, to assert that the critic shall inherit the dominion of the earth. "The critics of the present," Goethe forewarns Eckermann, "will be the statesmen of the future."¹ Oddly enough, this pretension is not based on the reviewer's pomp of spiritual integrity, or his exclusive gift for infallible decision. Art, Goethe preludes, has exhausted its vital force; modern man's rage after fact has blighted his æsthetic fecundity. With Pythagoras or even Descartes science could be a metaphysic, an *Æneid*, a plainsong to cosmos or godhead. Its territory has grown so monstrously huge and diverse that a lifetime is inadequate for mastering one small precinct of archæology or botany. Renan fancied that among civilized peoples government would be confided to the mathematician and chemist—as if the laws of a just society may be resolved like an equation or found crystallized at the bottom of a retort. Nothing is to be hoped in this epoch of sterility and specialization from artist or savant. But there exists a species of men,

¹ *Nouvelles conversations*, September 30, 1900.

usually nameless¹ and humble, who preserve a synthetic, universal outlook ; whose profession it is to touch all spheres of knowledge without being swallowed up by any. They stand at the heart of things, and form, as it were, a microcosm of culture. These toilers, obscure and disinterested, are critics. The perfect embodiment of their type seems to have been Johann Gottfried von Herder.² When States are guided by reason, when their purpose becomes happiness and justice for all, we shall cry aloud to these men of the race of Herder : " Come ; be our chiefs ! You abide at the focus of human endeavour ; you alone communicate with the world's central truth. Then direct us in the pivotal task of mankind ! "

As if in haste to accoutre himself for the empire to come, Léon Blum presently burgeoned forth as two critics in one. Both he and Lucien Herr had dinned upon Jaurès the necessity for a journal of his own, in which to advance the campaign for Socialist unity. *La Petite République*, a gazette of which Jaurès availed himself while battling for the cause of Dreyfus, was owned by capitalists, so that its pages were inhospitable to collectivist propaganda.

¹ M. Blum once remarked : " The only honest criticism is anonymous criticism ; that is the sum of English journalism." —Jules Renard, *Journal inédit*, March 14, 1901.

² This German poet, philosopher and theologian (1744-1803) was a prodigy of catholic information and daring originality. He was a pioneer of the *Sturm und Drang*, and founded the sciences of comparative mythology, religion and philology. He was a critic of painting, sculpture and literature in many tongues, including Spanish, English and Hebrew.

Herr had been compelled to resign from *La Revue de Paris*, the bourgeois proprietors of which sealed its columns against Dreyfusard agitation. The librarian's first impulse glanced toward a weekly modelled after the New York *Nation*. From an unidentified Mæcenas—assuredly not young M. Blum—he cajoled an endowment of 100,000 francs.¹ On second thought, the fund appeared less than ample. With the donor's consent, Herr undertook to multiply it through speculation in the stock market. After some weeks of desperate plunging, not a centime remained.¹ Thus it happened that Jaurès' eminent daily was founded in 1904 with a modicum of pecuniary backing. It was Herr who discovered "its perfect, its irreplaceable title" of *l'Humanité* and organized its battery of cultural departments served by a crew of seventeen assistant professors. Jaurès was political editor, Herr assumed charge of foreign policy and Léon Blum "doubled" as critic of theatre and letters. The new journal gave its "house-warming" on April 19. "How many celebrities in one small nook!" exclaimed Jules Renard. Among those present were Anatole France, Jaurès, Herr, Mirbeau, Briand and Léon Blum, "active and feverish like a nymph Egeria."³ Within a year, the amateur editors were confronted by a disconcerting truth. If a labourer could afford only one journal,

¹ Among Herr's steadfast patrons was Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, a wealthy professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne.

² Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*.

³ *Journal inédit* (p. 1095).

and the bourgeois *Matin* provided news while his own party organ regaled him with doctrine and erudition, he would buy *Le Matin*. The circulation of *l'Humanité* had never exceeded 12,000, and subscriptions were the rarest of phenomena. Its programme was drastically revised. First to be jettisoned were the columns dedicated to the good, the beautiful and the true—among them the elegant feuilletons of its dramatic and literary editor.¹

Out of the shipwreck he salvaged material with which to lade a pair of books. One was a reprint of selected literary articles.² From its pages may be gleaned a few personal facts and traits. Seven years before, M. Blum had travelled in Italy. He heartily disliked illustrated books. Among his pet aversions were the novels of Paul Bourget and Pierre Loti, but he adored the genius of Mme de Noailles. In his opinion, artistic and literary creations "are perhaps the only legitimate form of property." In a footnote occurred one of his infrequent pleasantries. Gautier had coupled *Goethe* and *poète*; this was pronounced to be "the handsomest visual rhyme in French literature." The book gained for its writer his earliest professional recognition. No less a pontiff than Émile Faguet, editor of *La Revue Latine*, hailed him

¹ The newspaper benefited from its altered policy, and survives to this day. At present *l'Humanité* is the mouthpiece of the French Communist Party; its political editor is Senator Marcel Cachin.

² Léon Blum, *En Lisant : réflexions critiques* (1906).



as *un penseur d'élite*, who "abounds in subtle, penetrating reflections," characterized by "taste, finesse and psychological instinct." "He is one of the authorized critics of to-day," this magistrate of letters decided; "he will be one of the first critics of to-morrow." Under M. Faguet's eye, however, were several passages which he can scarcely have regarded as flattering. It was remarked, for instance, that his essay on Hugo reveals "a delicacy and sensitiveness to poetic craft which, in M. Faguet, are sufficiently startling."¹ In consequence, perhaps, the eulogies were punctuated with groans of horror. It appeared that the newcomer had not confined himself to æsthetic jurisprudence, but had invoked moralistic canons also—that is, the precepts of Socialism. The allegation of partisan bias was not without colour; after all, M. Blum was one of the spokesmen of a proselytizing organ. Paul and Victor Marguerite were taken sharply to task for dedicating their history of the Paris Commune to conquerors and conquered alike. Lafcadio Hearn—confessed to be lacking in superior qualities both as artist and thinker—was palpably hauled into the arena to serve as whipping-boy for Japanese emperor-worship in particular and nationalist bigotry in general. The centenary of George Sand did not inspire an appraisal of her longevity as a novelist but on account of her Socialist exploits under the provisional government of 1848. Anatole France's *Crainquebille* was made the text of a harangue celebrating Socialism as the first attempt

¹ *En Lisant* (p. 164).

to remodel human life in a rational and scientific way. On the whole, however, M. Blum was governed by the soundest of intuitions—that he could best serve the cause by demonstrating that the proletarian school had furnished a critic able to hold his own, in knowledge, flair and style, with the most competent reviewers of the bourgeois press.

M. Faguet's further accusation that he was pro-German and anti-French was based in part upon his reaction to *Au Service d'Allemagne*, by Maurice Barrès. It is agreeable to record that never for an instant did M. Blum's estrangement from Barrès the man prejudice his admiration for Barrès the artist. If *Les Amitiés Françaises*, with its theme of *revanche*, is "the most detestable of his works," it is also "the most endearing"; to open a new volume of Barrès "is as if I had regained the fatherland of my youth." The central character of his novel *Au Service d'Allemagne* is an Alsatian lad named Ehrmann. Instead of emigrating to Paris, he resolves to fight the battle of French civilization in the very stronghold of Prussianism, the German army. M. Blum's offence consisted in pointing out that the hero is by name and blood not Celtic but Teuton, and that the savageries he encounters in an artillery regiment are inevitable to refined and sensitive beings under all militaristic systems, French or Italian as well as Brandenburger.¹ His second misdemeanour was a lack of patriotism regarding a questionnaire conducted by Jacques

¹ *En Lisant* (pp. 16-20).

Morland in the *Mercure de France* upon the intellectual influence of Germany. With Sedan only a generation past, the result, from artists, scientists and savants, was a chorus of pæans to the ascendancy of Gallic culture. M. Blum took arms of enlightenment against the sea of chauvinism. Germany's contribution to the plastic arts, he admitted, was nugatory; her leading man of letters, Gerhard Hauptmann, was scarcely of world importance; and in science, with the possible exception of Helmholtz, she had produced no man of genius comparable to Darwin or Pasteur. But the ideas of Kant, for good or evil, had determined nineteenth-century philosophy; while the two men chiefly answerable for refreshing European thought during the last four decades were Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. As for Debussy's taunts against German music, men like Richard Wagner renovate the atmosphere itself in which their arts exist; so that merely to breathe is to submit to their influence.¹ When M. Blum declared that the giant figure of Tolstoi bestrode all Europe, and that *War and Peace* is the greatest of novels, he might have been pardoned. But the literary nationalists were incensed by his response to the fourth item of another questionnaire, propounded by the *Weekly Critical Review*, an Anglo-French organ which had just been launched with the blessing of His Majesty King Edward VII. The critic declared that he preferred to any living Frenchman not only Tolstoi but two other foreign

¹ *Idem* (pp. 27-37).

novelists, an Italian named Gabriele d'Annunzio and an Englishman then unknown across the Channel, Thomas Hardy. The latter's *Jude the Obscure* he shamelessly averred, "is one of the most profound, poignant and original books that I know; almost equally admirable is *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*."¹

During 1908, M. Blum contributed articles to *La Grande Revue* on Paul Bourget and Henry Bataille, and to *La Revue de Paris* on the poetry of the Comtesse de Noailles. Save for these relapses, *En Lisant* denotes his farewell to the mystery of literary criticism. No recital of his activities in that field should terminate without offering a savour of his mettle at its zenith. Among forty-four essays, one stands pre-eminent for momentum, oratory and the most winning quality in a reviewer, capacity for full-throated admiration. It is an article on the history, in four stout volumes, which Jean Jaurès wrote of the French Revolution, from the convocation of the States-General to the fall of Robespierre.² The first sentiment aroused by such a work, the critic maintains, is astonishment bordering on stupefaction. Jaurès was not only engulfed in legislative toil and occupied incessantly with journalism; he also travelled without pause from one end of France to the other in the service of his party. How, then, had he mustered sheer physical time for documenting and composing within five

¹ *En Lisant* (p. 62).

² Jean Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste de la révolution française* (1901-1905).

years a work which from any other man would have exacted two decades? And how did it chance that Jaurès, fresh to historical writing, had on the instant found himself equal to the most perilous of undertakings? With his learning and dexterous use of materials he had amazed even professionals; he had discovered or interpreted a throng of texts ignored by specialists; and he had drafted no mere sketch, but reared a monument—"the most lofty, ample and solid of all trophies erected to the French Revolution."¹ The enigma is resolved in part by Jaurès' force and lucidity of brain; "one feels on every page the immediate clarity of intuition, the divination of mind, which unearths from a chaos of facts the profound truth which it conceals." But he was indebted also to the novelty of his guiding thesis, which permitted him to envisage the data from an original point of view. Not that his Socialist convictions betrayed him, throughout the immense work, into a single distortion of fact. On the contrary, his impartiality is phenomenal; there is no touch of passion and hatred. This *Histoire socialiste* is history without epithet, noble and serene. To Mignet, Taine and Michelet was left the task of expounding the political and intellectual causes of the Revolution; Jaurès was the first to insist that it was an uprising of bourgeois capitalism. Within one spacious canvas he assembled a host of direct, precise facts demonstrating to what a degree of

¹ The quotation is from François-Victor-Alphonse Aulard (1849-1928), the leading authority of his day upon the French Revolution.

power and wealth this caste had raised itself at the term of the eighteenth century. It had seized upon stocks, bonds and municipal real estate ; it was beginning to usurp agrarian land. The convulsion of 1789 extended into the political order that supremacy which the middle-class already enjoyed in the field of economics.¹

"His style," the essay concludes in a burst of eloquence, "is notable equally for richness, propriety and a sort of instantaneous obedience to his thought. It is far more poetic than oratorical, for M. Jaurès does not write as he speaks but speaks as he writes. I scarcely know with what to compare his prose, unless it is the prose of Victor Hugo. His composition is more sustained and consistent than that of Hugo. It is more tranquil, and causes us to think of a calm, powerful flood rather than an ocean lashed by storms. It is a great river instead of the sea. The resemblance between the two men consists in their amplitude, energy and poetic luxuriance ; above all, in a certain spontaneous command of words, images and facts themselves. There is no occasion for surprise. M. Jaurès is a poet—that is to say, the exact opposite of a dreamer."²

Simultaneously with this book, M. Blum pub-

¹ The Reign of Terror, however, was essentially proletarian and Communist ; the Ninth Thermidor may be interpreted as a victory of bourgeois reaction. Jaurès, according to Jules Renard, considered Robespierre "the great man of the Revolution."—*Journal inédit*, February 9, 1907.

² *En Lisant* (pp. 274-281).

lished a volume of dramatic criticism,¹ also retrieved in part from the columns of *l'Humanité*. The truth is that he had taken advantage of his connection with the Socialist newspaper to launch himself into a trade so bewitching as to absorb most of his literary product for eight years, and seduce him into accepting employment from one bourgeois journal after another—*La Grande Revue*, *Gil Blas*, *Comœdia*, *Le Matin*. As early as 1900 he had cast longing eyes on this vocation—for reasons of intellectual morality. Reverting for the last time to the *Nouvelles conversations*, we hear Eckermann, on June 7 of that year, announcing that he has rebuffed the entreaties of the Frankfort *Gazette* for a series of literary articles. Goethe approves; he had rather see his friend a dramatic critic. The job would be difficult, explains the oracle, but salutary. In our day opinion does not apply to works for the theatre the same habits of judgment as to other creations of the intellect. There are exacting critics of literature. In the case of a novel, of a collection of essays or poems, their stern decision allots to the writer his just station in the hierarchy of authors. But if the subject is a comedy or drama, the very meaning of the words employed appears to change. In the theatre “excellent,” “interesting” and “well-made” are equivalent to “mediocre” and “insignificant” in any other department of letters.

¹ Léon Blum, *Au Théâtre : réflexions critiques, première série* (1906). It is the first of his four volumes of dramatic criticism. I have been unable to examine this book, which is out of print; but its three successors are in my hands.

For example," pursues Goethe, warming to the topic, "are you not astounded to observe the facility with which masterpieces are bred in the playhouse? At least one is born every year. When it is not the *Dame de chez Maxim* it is *l'Aiglon*. The hour has come for halting this corruption. It is not true that *chefs-d'œuvre* are more frequent in the theatre than anywhere else. It is not true that, year in and year out, thirty 'original, fascinating and distinguished' new plays are mounted. Because we receive words ready-made from the lips of an actor instead of perusing the printed phrase—is that a reason for suspending our judgment and relaxing the severity of our taste?"

To this query M. Blum, in his own practice, answered with a ringing negative, but he grew adept at speaking plain truths without personal offence to the victim.¹ Not a solitary masterpiece did he discover; nevertheless, he encountered more than one new play which he could applaud as mark-worthy, fresh and admirable. It was his privilege to recount, among numerous others, the first Paris performances of Shaw's *Candida*, Pinero's *His House in Order*, the *Frühlings Erwachen* of Franz Wedekind, Rostand's *Chantecler*, Sudermann's *Stein unter Steinen*, Henry Bernstein's *Israël*, Maeterlinck's *l'Oiseau bleu* and d'Annunzio's *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*. His colleagues of the period remember that the play-

¹ From the author of the *Vie de Jésus* he learned the art of conducting a polemic with urbanity. The famous agnostic, he holds, introduced politeness into French controversy.—Léon Blum, *Premiers paradoxes sur Renan*.

houses were haunted by a tall, thin and stooping figure, surmounted by the broad-brimmed felt hat and apparelled in the rusty black habiliments of a provincial pedant. He still affects the wide-brimmed hat, but has added a pair of gaiters and adopted attire which may not vie in elegance with that of André Tardieu, but will cause no more than passing distress to a London fitter.¹ A thumbnail sketch of Léon Blum the critic, drawn with the liveliness of malice, has been preserved by André Gide. "He loves to give himself importance," sneered the reviewer's classmate at the Lycée Henri IV, and "never addresses you save with the air of a patron. If he meets you by chance at a rehearsal or in the wings of a theatre, he throws an arm about your waist, neck or shoulder ; though he may not have seen you for twelve months, he gives every one the impression that he quit you the night before, and that he is your most intimate friend." After the martyr of his crayon emerged as Président du Conseil, the novelist deemed it prudent to retouch his portrait. These juvenile strictures, he apologized, were "only occasional notes, scrawled on the pages of my memorandum-book. I said that Blum was too much pleased with himself. Ah, well ; no ! The future proved that he did not overrate his merit. It was I—because his value did not lie

¹ It appears to be a sartorial law among radical chieftains that their untidiness of garb varies inversely with the progress of their opinions. As early as 1920, Léon Daudet remarked in *Au Temps du Judas* : "Everything is possible, but this amazes me—Léon Blum, or the revolution in pearl-grey gloves."

wholly in the artistic domain which I then fancied all-important—it was I who did not know how to grasp his worth. I continued that he loved to give himself importance. Again, no ! He did not give himself importance. He had it. Our part was to discern it little by little. ‘He never addresses you save with the air of a patron ?’ *Oh, parbleu !* This patronizing tone may have been rather annoying at the time, when he was only a critic ; but it derived from the very clear sense which he already had of his own merit.”¹

Whatever his outward manner, M. Blum’s theatre reports were exempt from egotism. The pronouns *je* and *moi* are used with conspicuous economy ; the reader, when they occur, tends at last to give a start of surprise. Not once in eight years did he indulge the vanity of a “wise-crack,” or a purple conceit of diction. Only once, in three volumes, did a private allusion escape. This appeared in his chronicle of Bernstein’s *Israël*, a tragedy in which a young anti-Semite leader discovers that he is the son of a Hebrew banker. Such a topic, M. Blum avowed, “may, among Jews, in addition to other susceptibilities easy enough to comprehend, wound a sentiment which I, myself born a Jew, neither share nor approve—a revulsion against public debate of questions involving their religion, race or simply customs of thought and feeling.”² No idea of fetching the galleries with an air of superior bore-

¹ Quoted with sarcasms by Gustave Téry in his *Vie de Monsieur Léon Blum*, 1936.

² *Au Théâtre*, second series (p. 207).

dom visited his consciousness. He was enamoured of the playhouse ; to review a performance, good or ill, was an adventure into which he plunged with such engrossment as completely to forget himself. But certain distinctive and curious features peer out from these objective essays. We become aware of a consummate faculty of attention ; M. Blum listened at the theatre as if he had an ear in every pore. To that sense we are obliged for the meticulous, minute analyses which endow his four books with authority as a compend of the French stage from April, 1904, to June, 1911. His memory was instant and formidable. The translators of *Candida* were rebuked for rendering back into French not quite the original text of a maxim borrowed by Shaw from La Rochefoucauld. The latter wrote : *Il y a de bons mariages ; il n'y a pas de délicieux*. The reviewer's prompt and lettered ear caught the blunder of M. and Mlle Hamon in retranslating the epigram thus : *Il y a des mariages de convenance ; il n'y a pas de délicieux*.¹ There is also a pervading spirit of candour. Judgment is seldom delivered without its train of reasons. When a production is most disliked, special care is observed in hunting down points entitled to compliment. No datum at the reviewer's command is withheld from the reader, who is thus furnished with equivalent grounds for dissent. The forms of play construction interest M. Blum but slightly ; and *mise en scène*, though luxurious, rarely attaches his eye. Now and then he brings himself to discuss a stage

¹ *Au Théâtre*, second series (p. 135).

director, but he has an antipathy against so much as mentioning an actor. His duty to a cast was ended, thought this scorner of the star system, when he printed its roster at the head of his column. Even the monarch of the Paris boards is generally dismissed with a short but kindly nod : " M. Lucien Guitry obtained one of his most brilliant successes as a comedian." There are two matters, however, which engage the critic's untiring curiosity and summon all his powers of learning, insight and concentration. These are the individuality of the playwright and the psychology of his drama. Just what elements compose the author's talent? Precisely how do the gifts of Octave Mirbeau resemble or vary from those of Alfred Capus and Marcel Prévost? The writer has postulated a group of characters. Are their attributes consistent and creditable? Do the persons talk and act throughout the fable in severe harmony with the premises of their being? If the response is affirmative, the drama wins M. Blum's esteem, despite faults of mounting, style or construction. If it is negative, the play is damned, whatever its beauty of speech and dexterity of incident.

A stern test of a reviewer is to confront him with two plays, a classic and a novelty, and observe what fresh thing he can say about the one, and what enduring thing about the other. It happened, in the course of routine, that M. Blum chronicled a revival of *Romeo and Juliet* and the first performance of *Chantecler*. André Antoine's production of the former, he declared, outlaws the charge that

Shakespeare's technique is diffuse and complex ; the parade of episodes is marshalled with such clearness that the intrigue acquires a sort of linear unity. The French version of Louis de Gramont is a paragon of good faith ; it has every excellence save that it is unpoetic. The tragedy itself is one of the absolute masterpieces contrived by human genius in thirty centuries. " I put aside its canvas of history, customs and Italian feudalism ; together with its disport of wit, gallant grace and sophisticated elegance. The poem remains—the supreme, the unique love-song of all literature. What is comparable in any tongue with the balcony scene ? Where shall we find an embodiment of love so purely and sheerly melic ? In Racine, Heine and Musset we encounter amorous torment, jealousy, the fret of desire, the flush or despondence of memory. These are not love, but states which it engenders. Barring passages of *Le Cid*, no other work, whether drama or poem, distils the very quintessence of love, free from secondary joy and pain. Here is rapture without cause, flight without goal. Neither circumstances nor incidental emotions propel its bardic rush. The chant takes wing and soars alone. This exploit has prospered but once ; perhaps it will never again be undertaken."¹

The most notable and eagerly awaited event in the history of the French playhouse, attests the critic, was the production of Rostand's fantasy at the Théâtre Porte-Saint-Martin on February 7,

¹ *Au Théâtre*, fourth series (pp. 101-105).

1910.¹ Not the *Mariage de Figaro*, not *Hernani* itself, aroused so much hope, tension and fever. In a case of this sort the public asks for more than delicately nuanced impressions. It demands of the reviewer "not an opinion but a verdict." Judgment must regretfully be pronounced that *Chantecler* failed to achieve that incontestable, unanimous triumph which was foreseen by M. Rostand's friends. To be sure, the play heightens the author's stature. Far from contenting himself with the obvious bays of another *Cyrano*, he has adventured a risk, a peril. He has attempted not merely the new but the extraordinary. His æsthetic victory surpasses even that of *l'Aiglon*; never before has M. Rostand offered such persuasive proof of his endowment as artist and poet. The beauties of his drama were greeted with ecstasy; the prologue and first two acts won a continuous ovation. But from the start of the third act there developed a feeling not perhaps of disappointment, but certainly of inquietude and resistance. The audience was puzzled by an instinct that the course of the action was not what it could and should have been. These qualms were not due, as might have been feared, to the absurdity of a stage peopled with barnyard fowls, or of characters who at one moment are familiar beasts and at the next moral abstractions. To these singularities the spectators promptly adjusted themselves.

¹ The name part was confided to Lucien Guitry, a fact which must be learned from sources other than M. Blum's book.

"The explanation," determines the critic, "lies in the fact that *Chantecler*, a drama exclusively poetic until the curtain of the second act, becomes at the outset of the third both lyric and ironic. Yet we know, from ancient observation, that beyond all else the French public requires of a theatrical work, whatever it may be, unity of tone, kind and suggestion. . . . Like all romantics, M. Rostand believes in the vatic function of the bard. The themes which he presents are of high imagination and nobility. They are of universal significance, applicable to all men and all times. He elaborates them like a true and often a great poet; he varies and enhances them with an exuberance bespeaking not only an artful hand and cultured mind, but the authentic puissance of inspiration. In the rôle of Chanticleer we remark the generous grandeur of Hugo, the pathetic firmness of Corneille. The emblematic cock takes on the seeming of a paladin, a knight-errant of the *Légende des Siècles*. He has, like Christ, his Passion and Evangel. The lyric, the positive section of the work, is massive, simple and lofty. But to this poetic affirmation, this clear and spacious Credo, M. Rostand opposes a satiric and negative division which is disconcerting in its obscurity and pettiness. . . . Before us passes a march, studiously burlesque, of fantastic snobs, pedants of the *salons*, envious pygmies of letters, Symbolists, vers-librists—of all the monsters whom M. Rostand seeks to attack and destroy. Some of his intentions, though not all, are magnanimous. But we had not been prepared for

these scenes of Aristophanic comedy. The very style changes. Poetry is invaded by colloquialism. To ridicule his enemies, the cock borrows their manners and speech. And M. Rostand appears to take such delight in his parody that we are not sure whether he wishes us to hate or applaud it. . . . There is the drama's fundamental vice. When Don Quixote needs a foil, opposite him is placed Sancho Panza, also a perpetual type of human nature. But to search out, as M. Rostand has done, the most ephemeral and paltry whims of fashion and bad taste; to descend from immortal philosophy to the lampoons of the moment—that, of necessity, disrupts all balance; which is the fault that the public more or less clearly sensed.”¹

M. Blum's final dramatic criticism, dated June 22, 1911, concerned a revival of *Le Vieux Marcheur* by Henri Lavedan, whom he saluted as a genuine son of Beaumarchais. He had begun with a vehement passion for the theatre; by now, he had enough. Perhaps his satiety was not unrelated to the fact that in the Spring of 1909, and again of 1910, he himself was obliged, doubtless under assignment from the business office of his newspaper, to delve among the abject pasquinades of the hour. On terms of comradeship he had associated with the minds of Shaw, Sudermann and even Shakespeare; he sank to frequenting the masterpieces of Rip, Nanteuil, Gorsse, Carré and Barde. We behold him, at certain scandalous playhouses, peering down like Gulliver, with all the tolerance

¹ *Au Théâtre*, third series (pp. 230-240).

at his command, upon the microscopic and offensive antics of Lilliputians. He was nauseated by the ferocity of the productions, by their libels upon men and women who lacked means of defence or retort. He had the courage, in Paris, to be shocked by the grossness of these revues ; and warned the writers that in the pursuit of bawdry they would end " by neglecting to have wit, or, what is worse, by changing their hearers into prudes."

His most authoritative pronouncement upon the drama, voicing his ultimate reflections concerning this art-form, was not a review but a lecture delivered on January 19 and 26, 1911, at the Odéon in Paris. The subject was Corneille's *Rodogune*. Though defining Corneille as a " political " dramatist, the speaker refrained from obtruding his own Socialist opinions, and from denouncing an author for whom the masses did not exist, but only heroic individuals. The utterance is criticism without alloy ; in scholarship likewise, in originality and acumen, it forms a significant rehearsal of *Stendhal*. We may not dwell upon its profound and documented analysis of historic drama, or the parallel impressively drawn between the age of Corneille and the Romantic movement. One quotation must suffice :

" There are in general three categories of dramatic writers, depending on the nature of the stimulus which sets their creative imagination to work. For writers of the first sort, the stimulus is a fact of purely psychologic order—a trait of character observed near at hand, or an anecdote across

which flashes a particular type of sensibility, an original aspect of temperament. About that feature the character as an entirety shapes itself; the events of the plot, in turn, are contrived as a function of the character already moulded. The perfect example of this category is Racine. To the second species belong the most powerful and striking talents, such as Molière and Shakespeare. With the same immediate glance, they appear to conjure up both a character and the situation in which it will manifest itself with utmost energy and truth. For authors of the third class, the primary phenomenon setting their genius into play is the vision of a situation—the representation, totally physical and material, of a conflict, a dramatic problem. Only subsequent to this stroke are the characters imagined; and then in such wise as to serve the data of the problem, the suppositions of the conflict. The procedure of writers of the third class is opposite to that of authors of the first. The latter invent situations as the function of a character; the others devise characters as the function of a situation. Corneille was one of the third sort of dramatic architects. The proof is that the effort of which he was proudest, which all his life procured for him the deepest satisfaction, was that of having sought out and discovered situations which were new. Racine, on occasion, made shift with a plot from Seneca or Euripides, being well assured of animating and refreshing it with his human creations. Corneille aspired to treat novel subjects only. If we set aside the works which he composed

in imitation of the Spanish, under the influence of Guillén de Castro and Lope de Vega, there is but one exception to this rule, which is his *Médée*.”¹

Thanks to an entry in Jules Renard's diary, we have a glimpse of M. Blum in the act of plying his craft. The occasion was the first Paris performance of d'Annunzio's tragedy, *La Gioconda*, at the Œuvre Théâtre. Seated with Mme Blum just behind Renard, the critic led the applause after the first act. In the lobby, during the intermission, M. Blum remarked : “ You seem angry.” “ I am, at your enthusiasm,” the playwright growled. “ The work has extreme lyric beauty,” protested the other. During the second act came the lines of the sculptor, Lucio Settala, which Arthur Symons has translated : “ When she laid her hand on the marble that she had chosen, and turning to me said ‘ This,’ all the mountains, from root to summit, breathed beauty.” Catulle Mendès, in a box, rapped the floor with his stick and cried out : “ That's good !” Even Renard clapped his hands. “ Aha !” exulted Léon Blum ; “ you are applauding.” At the *entr'acte* the dramatist explained : “ It's not a bad couplet. I don't deny that d'Annunzio has a certain sense of plastic beauty. But I protest against your passion for this Italian, when we have a Victor Hugo with twenty beauties to the page like that of the marble. I prefer a Gautier, a Banville.” “ No, no !” shouted the critic. “ A Beaudelaire, a Verlaine !” insisted Renard, who at this point had the honour

¹ *Au Théâtre*, fourth series (p. 328).

of jostling the future Prime Minister's cane, the handle of which was applied to his mouth. No teeth were broken, but a lip was cut. The victim was annoyed. "You shouldn't carry your stick like that," said Renard. "He's right," Mme Blum agreed. At the following interlude the debate was resumed with rising acrimony. "Have you read the play?" demanded the critic. "No, but I'm hearing it," snapped Renard. "It's full of delightful things." "What things? Name one!" "I don't remember. Anyhow, the actors are playing badly." "I don't think or feel like you," the dramatist burst forth, "because you are an intelligent man—too much so—and a man who is too intelligent is a poor judge of art." "Oh, why?" asked Mme Blum. "What nonsense!" her husband exclaimed. "Not at all," concluded the playwright. "To avoid mistakes, you have to know everything, so you are the prey of every emotion. Your intelligence enables you to write charming things. But it misguides you; it is certain that you could say exactly the opposite with equal cleverness."¹

From the same source we learn that M. Blum was not free from a contagion to which dramatic critics are particularly susceptible—an ambition to write plays of their own. He would not have been the first Premier of France to compose or even produce a play. He himself reviewed, with many compliments, Georges Clemenceau's dramatic fable, *Le Voile de Bonheur*, which was presented at the Théâtre

¹ Jules Renard, *Journal inédit*, January 21, 1905.

RACE OF HERDER

Porte-Saint-Martin on December 8, 1910. M. Blum wrote at least three acts of a stage-piece entitled *La Colère*, or "Anger." Romain Coolus, who read the manuscript, objected that "the hero doesn't talk like a man in a rage ; he doesn't curse enough."¹ Whether the play was finished I do not know. Certainly it was not produced. It has doubtless gone the way of M. Blum's novel.

¹ *Idem*, June 23, 1902.

CHAPTER VII

IVORY TOWER

AFTER he left the staff of *l'Humanité*, M. Blum's dramatic articles were in general innocent of Socialist proselytism, as might have been expected from their publication in capitalist journals. That he could reconcile himself to such employment may be attributed to the circumstance that during the period his instinct as a man of letters snatched the bit between its teeth. How far he was swept from militancy in that last independent gallop may be judged from his review of *Coriolanus*. Instead of denouncing Shakespeare, the critic strove to exonerate him for such taunts against the proletariat as "the mutable, rank-scented many." In that era, M. Blum pleaded, it was difficult to be a democrat; "the history of the epoch was a succession of religious and political upheavals which the populace provoked or suffered with equal violence and passivity." The bard himself, sprung from the people, "was no doubt drawn little by little from the class into which he was born, if not by his genius then by his associations and culture." There followed a significant observation: "In such a case, it is usual for the parvenus of intelligence to contract a sort of physical nausea for the multitude's inconstancy, ignorance and vulgarity."¹

¹ *Au Théâtre*, third series (p. 306). In fairness to Shakespeare, the reviewer might have quoted passages from *King Lear* on the redistribution of property (e.g. Act III, Scene iv), which are well qualified to serve as texts for Socialist homilies.

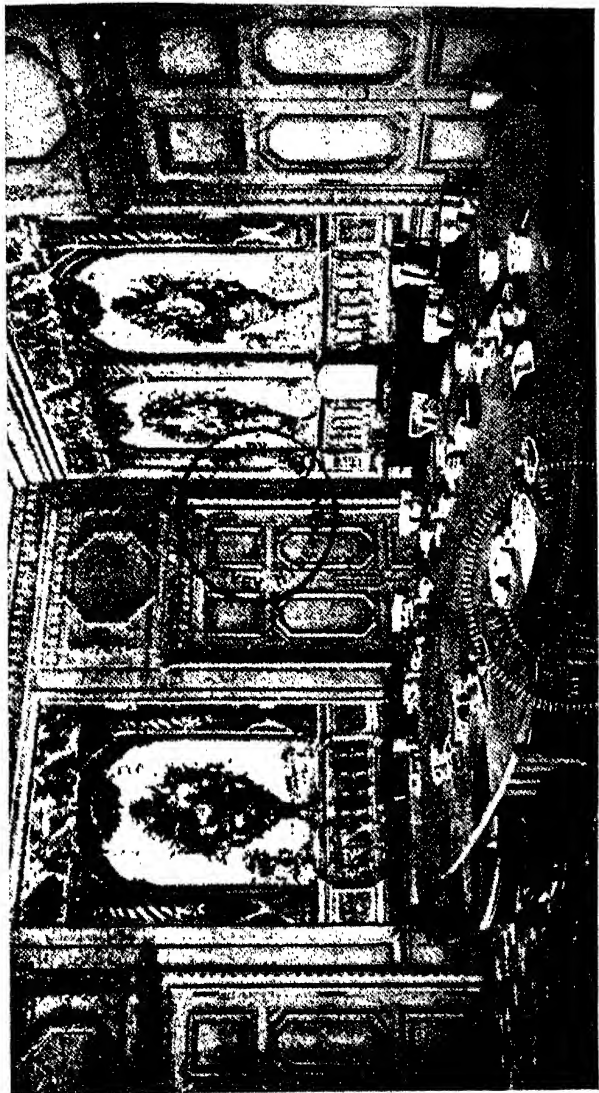
But the writer would not have been Léon Blum had he remained for long unpossessed by what he considered a moral cause. A problem of this kind, in his view without essential relation to economics, did in truth infatuate his thought during several years—so much so, he admitted, that for a space his chief concern as a critic was whether the drama under scrutiny furnished support to the thesis at which he had arrived.¹ That thesis was the right of women, on a parity with men, to sexual experience before wedlock. His cogitations found issue in a study of 342 pages, entitled *Du mariage*, which was printed in 1907. There is no denying that at the moment, in Paris itself, the work proved sensational and shocking. One of its predictions is quoted even now, in disparagement of the Prime Minister, by political enemies. In the future, he maintained, “young girls will return home from their lovers as naturally as they return at present from a walk, or from having tea with a friend.”² But he protested, with a sincerity not to be doubted, that his purpose had been to compose “a moral book,” and that he had reasoned as “an ethical thinker.” “I have written,” he declared, “and I have reflected, in good faith.” His qualms as to the wisdom of publishing the treatise were overcome at length by a persuasion of the soundness of its conclusions. This paragraph serves as frontispiece: “I beg leave to make public the dedication previously offered to my wife ;

¹ *Idem*, preface to the second series (June, 1909).

² *Du mariage* (p. 243).

meaning to indicate that into the volume's conception there entered neither deceit nor rancour, but on the contrary a sentiment of gratitude ; and that it was written by a happy man."

To view the phenomena of matrimony, his argument begins, in life about us or memory, is to promenade among ruins. So widespread is the havoc—in falsehood, ruse, scandal, degeneration of character and heartbreak—that one may question seriously whether the institution is worth what it costs. The writer's own bent is toward free unions, without intermeddling by church or government. Scientific reflection indicates, however, that marriage has bestowed genuine good upon individual and race ; it is not in itself an evil establishment, but one that has been misapplied. The intention of this study is to point out the symptoms of disorder, and prescribe such measures as may tend to its survival as a human agency. What is its chronic malady, as revealed by an attentive diagnosis ? In his novel, *Mémoires de deux Jeunes mariées*, Balzac made a classic differentiation of young wives into opposite species—the mistress-courtesan type, and the domestic, maternal one. Assuredly there are women, and men too, whose fleshly appetites are insatiable. Possibly others, throughout life, go unwhipped of passion. But such persons are abnormal. The average human being is held under exclusive dominion by neither of Balzac's types ; they represent, rather, successive phases which each of us is bound to traverse. The novelist himself begged the question. Louise de



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Chaulieu killed herself in the full fever of youth ; Renée de l'Estorade, for all her pride and courage, grew vulnerable at last to rebellious instinct, as appears in that powerful but unfinished sequel, *Le Député d'Arcis*. We are obliged, then, to undergo a preliminary period characterized by fury for change and adventure—a period to be defined in plain terms as polygamous. “I am prepared, if you wish,” concedes the author, “to regard this impulse as sinful and vicious. But is its eradication within your power?” Not until that rage has spent itself does the season of monogamy arrive ; then, by a natural revolution, our taste for excitement and diversity gives way to relish for concord, stability and emotional peace. The mutation happens among women in the late twenties and early thirties ; among men, in the middle and late thirties.¹ The prime requisite of happy marriage is that husband and wife shall be at the same stage of amorous development. For boys and girls of equivalent purity a chance exists, though hazardous, of lifelong content ; their adjustments are made together. The least precarious union is that of spouses both of whom have transcended the polygamous era, and both of whom are spontaneously ready for monogamic life. But at present matrimony is commonly based on two presumptions—that the bride is without sexual experience, and the

¹ In this matter, as in his long service as a functionary of the State, M. Blum appears to have reserved the right of failing to practise what he preaches. He himself was first married at the age of twenty-four.

• bridegroom has laid the foundations of a career. Under current conditions, few men are prepared to support a household till they have reached an age at which they are verging upon, if they have not already achieved, the monogamous temperament. In other words, the typical modern marriage—and that is its deadly flaw—is between a wife whose polygamous term lies before her, and a husband who is at the point of leaving it behind.

A frustrate instinct is almost certain to avenge itself, frequently at a time when it causes a maximum of harm. Custom undertakes wholly to suppress the adventurous instinct in women. There are men likewise, more numerous than one suspects, who let slip during youth—on account of stern upbringing or absorption in labour—the season of erotic derring-do. In either case, the submerged force tends at last to burst free and involve that particular world in ruin—to the dismay, not least, of the partner conventionally branded as guilty. An illuminating instance is found in the tragedy of a poet. At the age of twenty he married a girl of nineteen. They were rapturously in love ; both were handsome, trusting and poor. Grievs experienced together redoubled their spring-like and courageous passion. But his gifts were so imperial as to conquer during his life, and indeed in his youth, that glory which writers customarily extort from posterity alone. At twenty-six he was famous, and already the chief of a school. He remained true to his wife, whom he had never ceased to adore. But other passions, perhaps ruling ones, which she

was unable to share, entered his life. The achievement of fame, he discovered, was not sufficient ; it must be tirelessly protected and consolidated. He was not only engrossed in work, but obliged to pay diligent court at newspaper offices and dash about Paris, among daubers and poetasters, with free tickets for the *première* of his latest drama. The tiny domicile became a sort of public inn, frequented by his votaries. If he did not neglect his wife, a considerable part of his existence was withdrawn from her, so that she grew to hate his career as the enemy of her love.

At this crisis he welcomed to their hearth a young man whom he considered a poet and faithful friend, and who proved to be neither. The stranger fell in love with his hostess. Wounded in her pride as a wife, she yielded little by little to the artful and skulking suit of the false friend. Whether she became his mistress no one knows. "For my part," M. Blum gallantly avers, "I do not think so." The fact as to this mooted question is unimportant. From the day when he learned that his wife loved another, the poet regarded himself as morally free ; a year later, he took a mistress. The household was destroyed, a romance was shattered. Mme Victor Hugo—for this is her story—was condemned to a lifetime of remorse and humiliation ; and her husband to years of resentment and lawless affairs. Let us imagine that she had postponed marriage to the age of twenty-nine. Many Sainte-Beuves, assuredly better chosen, would no doubt have occupied her youth ; for

Mme Hugo, whether she knew it or not, was obviously an *amoureuse*. But she would have attained a period at which instinct no longer clashed with reason. "From such glimpses of her as we catch in known documents, I am satisfied that she would then have made Hugo an ideal companion. What I affirm is that she would not have been lacerated by her husband's renown, or the stratagems serving its retention and advancement. The interest which divided them in youth would later have welded them together. Collaboration in his glory would have enlisted her pride and furnished a part of her happiness. But it was necessary first that she should reach the matrimonial age—which is the moral I desire to draw from this narrative."¹

Since the polygamous cycle is bound sooner or later to manifest itself, would it not be less cruel if it ran its course prior to rather than during wedlock? In the case of men, the answer without hesitation would be affirmative; society not only endures but abets the *vie de garçon*. But in the case of women we collide with the principle, or rather superstition, of bridal chastity, which is nothing more than a survival from an era in which females were sold in the market like cattle. For whose benefit, we may ask, does this prejudice exist? Certainly not for that of the young women themselves, who are doomed, at a cost of nervous and physical ill health, of psychic torture such as few men can imagine, to a period of celibacy which has

¹ *Du mariage* (p. 159).

rapidly extended itself, under our economic system, to include a third or even a half of their natural love-time. It is carelessly presumed that maidenhood is a normal condition ; as a matter of fact, since women are commonly more sensual and passionate than men, it is a state into which they are coerced by fear of social dishonour, and of blasting their matrimonial prospects. Is the superstition enforced, then, for the sake of men ? The theory that a chaste bride insures a true wife has been discredited to the point of ridicule. There are men who desire only vestals. Such cases are properly regarded as pathological ; they occur chiefly among professional seducers and elderly men whose sexual vitality has begun to abate. The truth is that virginity is unattractive to men. Let us inquire of certain bachelors. "How is it possible," they will answer, "to grow attached to these baroque and disconcerting creatures, who appear to belong to another race ; who speak a different language ; to whom you do not know what to say, and who do not know what to reply ; who at one moment alarm you with their mystery, and at the next repel you with their insipidity ?" Women become seductive in proportion as they have been formed by love. Observe any *salon* in which are gathered matrons and unwedded girls. About the former crowd all the men who are worth while ; the train of the latter consists of dutiful brothers and frightened adolescents. The task of initiating a girl's love-life is one of the most formidable a man can undertake ; "in a majority

of instances, the same man who would be horrified at the thought that his fiancée had had lovers, would at the bottom of his heart prefer to marry a widow or a *divorcée*.”¹

“If a part of the workers is unemployed (*chôme*), the other part must serve overtime.” As a direct result of obligatory spinsterhood, society bears upon its conscience the stain of prostitution. Call up in imagination this double vision : on the one hand, thousands of girls devoted to solitude and constraint ; and on the other, thousands of young women doomed to sell their favours, without choice or pleasure, to the first passer-by. The ones are forbidden and the others are condemned to men. What a picture ! Who can behold it unappalled ? That a girl in the vigour of youth should be obliged, under pain of obloquy and scandal, to smother an instinct which is the very motive of nature—this is barbarous. It is shocking that another should be bound, under threat of hunger, to deliver her body to the appetite of strangers. Compulsory abstinence from love, compulsory employment in love—these iniquities are almost equally revolting. Nevertheless, they compensate and condition each other ; the second is the counterweight, the ransom, of the first. “At the identical instant of the same night, I beheld the virgin on her doleful couch, straining empty arms toward the dream of love ; and the harlot, in her work-bed, dispatching with hasty boredom a task too oft repeated. I said to myself : ‘Neither is happy ; each misery complements the

¹ *Du mariage* (p. 288).

other. What an absurd apportionment ! And who knows ? The transient guest of the public woman is possibly the same youth that for the vestal symbolizes joy and passion. Quitting the one, he has sped to satisfy himself with the other. Would it not have been better had he remained ? ' . . . Perhaps that twin impression was the determining factor in my project of writing this book.'¹

Prostitution would survive even under a reign of economic justice, declares the writer, so long as the bigotry of pre-nuptial chastity for women rests in force. Girls should be instructed, he insists, that love and marriage are opposite things ; that the man ideally suited to inaugurate a woman's sex experience is probably the last one on earth she should wed. He destroys, incidentally, a fable current in other lands—that every Frenchman is a virtuoso of amour. The typical bourgeois youth of France, says he, owes his virile education to strumpets—a course in sexual egotism which, there as elsewhere, is almost fatal to happiness in wedlock. To the volume itself I refer those readers who are curious as to argumentative points not touched upon in this rapid *précis* ; they will find that M. Blum has anticipated and answered, at least to his own satisfaction, most of the objections likely to be raised. But no report of his book would be complete without an example, though in condensed form, of one of the "case-histories" which diversify his argument. There are some twelve of these short stories, drawn from biography and fiction, confided

¹ *Idem* (pp. 295-300).

to the author by women, or perhaps in a few instances invented by him. They illustrate bizarre and piquant aspects of matrimonial distemper, and usually support one head or another of his theme.

It was the delicate sensuality with which Mme Lucile P. . . . ate strawberries that fixed the recorder's attention—a light quiver of the mouth, the daintily avid gestures with which she attacked the dark, luscious fruit, as aromatic as a whole garden. Earlier in the evening he had been startled to hear her praise the composition of a sauce, the flavour of a meat. She was the irreproachable wife of a distinguished engineer, who, in the midst of great affairs, had kept his probity intact, and was respected for his kindness, a bit stern ; his intelligence, somewhat bookish ; his tact, wealth and coldness. He had married young, twenty years before, and worked hard, like a man with an equal passion for mathematics and money. "To me he had always appeared in love with his wife." The uncontested queen of an exclusive set, she was pointed out by husbands to their wives as a model, and cited even by women as the boast, or vindication, of their sex. Never before had the writer known a vivid feeling to alter that pure gaze, that delicate smile. The change did not elude the glance of the matron on his right. With what seemed to him a cryptic accent, she observed : "Two years ago Mme P. . . . did not like strawberries."

Soon afterwards, meeting an acquaintance, he complimented the latter on the charms of a young woman who had been seen in his company. "She

has been with me two years," explained the other ;
"before that, she was the mistress of P. . . ."
"What, the mining director?" "Certainly."
"Impossible ! Surely you are mistaken ?" "Not
in the least," responded the friend, with more
impatience than courtesy ; "but if you are so
determined that P. . . . never had a mistress, we'll
not insist upon it." The narrator continued
sceptical, till all at once he remembered his dinner
partner's comment. It was two years ago that Mme
P. . . . began to adore strawberries. It was two
years ago that her husband left his mistress. *Voilà !*
Everything was plain. Lucile had discovered his
infidelity ; there had been tears, reproaches,
storms ; and at last a reconciliation which aroused
once more a tenderness and passion long forgotten.
The small puzzle of the other evening was solved.
Vain of his clairvoyance, the raconteur hastened to
flaunt his discovery before the table companion of
that night. To his stupefaction, the lady assured
him that Lucile knew nothing of her husband's
delinquency. Then, pitying his crestfallen mien,
she smiled and pulled his ear. "You are a great
baby," she said. "Can't you understand that with
this girl, by happy chance, P. . . . was able to test,
and learn——" ; she hesitated, and was silent.
"What makes a wife in love with love," finished the
other, "and in consequence with strawberries ?"
But his neighbour rose. "Hold your tongue !" she
laughed. "Never have the P. . . . s been so
happy as at present. I don't know why I talked
to you as I have. These are things a woman should

never tell a man." From which M. Blum extracts the lesson that twenty years would not have been lost had the engineer and his wife been sexually civilized prior to their marriage ; and that the husband was lucky to have won his tardy education without disaster, and to have been blessed with a spouse at once so patient and devoid of suspicion.¹

The central theory of *Du mariage*, that nuptial success is practicable only to beings at the same stage of passional evolution, strikes hands across three volumes of dramatic criticism with a maxim of Stendhal which is quoted in Léon Blum's last and greatest literary work : "To love and be loved is not enough ; there must be the same kind of love." Earlier in these pages it has been recorded that *Stendhal et le Beylisme* was published in July, 1914. The dedication was to Lucien Herr. The study's appearance coincided with the crest of the trial at which Mme Josèphe-Marie-Auguste Caillaux was acquitted of murdering Gaston Calmette, editor of *Figaro*. Two weeks later came mobilization, and then the World War. The book could not be "launched," and it had no "press." M. Blum notes that "this essay of my mature years reverted to the lot of books *de début*, of first youth." Nevertheless, it gradually made a way. Those beneath whose eyes it fell by chance heralded it to others. Some years later, the author was surprised to learn that the edition had been exhausted. A second impression, as we have seen, was issued in 1930 ;

¹ *Du mariage* (pp. 56-60).

it won a sale of several thousand copies. The volume merited that honourable though leisurely triumph. Its style, without dimming a ray of M. Blum's energy and warmth, possesses an adult mastery such as he had never before attained, and probably has never since equalled. A comparison of the original with the translations from his pen figuring heretofore in this narrative will disclose that often I have felt obliged to contract what seemed to me intemperances of diffusion and tautology, which may in part be attributed to journalistic haste. Others than myself must have lamented the point of honour adopted by M. Blum, in his sundry reprints, of never changing a word. But it may be declared with assurance, though the vocabulary has grown more opulent, that *Stendhal* does not contain a syllable in excess. It is prose in the classic French tradition, terse, rapid, sinewy and luminous. The organization of the book is characterized by an easy security, an effortless control, which are to be explained by the years of scholarly investigation with which the author prefaced his enterprise. He had at the tip of his tongue every known word written by Stendhal; he had pored over and digested the vast material, biographic and critical, already extant on the subject, including articles from newspapers long perished and forgotten; he had even, in an instance or so, examined works in course of preparation, not yet published. But the supreme merit of his book lay in the fact that it was the earliest interpretation of Stendhal to envisage as a whole that many-faceted and singular

personality.¹ His exploit of imaginative insight and accurate documentation is unknown outside of France. It has not been translated into English, and was unmentioned in the bibliography of Stendhal catalogued in the fourteenth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, fifteen years after its first appearance ; though it is more commanding and definitive than any of the studies there cited—of Mérimée, Jacquemont, Taine, Sainte-Beuve and others.

Isolated men of genius, says M. Blum, like Goethe, Musset, Balzac and Tolstoi, have at first glance recognized the French novelist as a brother. With a sibylism curiously exact, he himself prophesied that he would not generally be read until about 1880. That he was ignored or misjudged while he lived and for almost a half-century thereafter was due to the remarkable tortuosity of his spirit. It was fashioned of components which would remain unintelligibly dissonant had not Pascal, in one of the profoundest of his "Thoughts," supplied a clue. "I do not esteem in a man the excess of one virtue," declared the philosopher of Port-Royal des

¹ Henri-Marie Beyle (1783-1842) was born at Grenoble, but lived in Paris during the Consulate and the first years of the Empire. Becoming a cavalry officer, though he had never mounted a horse, he served with aloof and distinguished courage in several of the Napoleonic campaigns, including the Russian invasion. The pen-name of "Stendhal" he adopted from a small German town, Winckelmann's birthplace. His writings comprehend books of travel and history ; studies of Italian painting and the music of Haydn, Mozart and Rossini ; and two pre-eminent novels, *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830) and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839).

Champs, "unless at the same time I behold in him an excess of the virtue directly opposite." Thus the war-like valour of Epaminondas was compensated by his benevolence, equally superlative. Stendhal's inconsistencies resemble the scales of a balance, inverse but counterpoising. He was the cerebral offspring of eighteenth-century rationalists, of Destutt de Tracy, Condillac and particularly Helvétius. Under their austere influence he cultivated that deliberate dryness of style which has been compared, for nudity and precision, to algebra ; and learned a horror of "verbalism" which impelled him, each morning, to read the *Code Civil* as a pattern of composition. Their method of logic and empirical observation, applied by Stendhal for the first time to states of feeling, rendered him the father of modern psychology. Simultaneously, proceeds M. Blum, he was an authentic son of Jean-Jacques, and was therefore persuaded that emotions are not only the chief material of art but the sole spring of happiness and indeed the sovereign purpose of existence. He himself was gifted with a susceptibility amounting to disease ; he could be stirred to tears and violent palpitations of the heart by the sound of bells, or the tender hue of orange which limns at dusk the contours of a mountain-range. He proposed to classify human beings according to their relative capacity for emotion ; his aristocracy, his "caste of the élite," was to be formed of men in whom sensibility of nervous organization arrives at maximum intensity. This hyperæsthesia was offset and controlled in turn by still another element of

character, to which Stendhal gave the title of "Espagnolism." It was a sort of ferocious inner arrogance, the duty of which was to keep one's own personality, at all costs, impenetrable and intact. It loathed business and money, together with every manifestation of bourgeois procedure and disposition; it cherished *Le Cid's* knightly sense of honour, and regarded as depraved any action touched with material interest.

Following the convulsions of 1848, a group of students at the École Normale, led by Hippolyte Taine and Francisque Sarcey, planted the first obscure shoots of Stendhal's renown. As protestants against Romanticism, they were admirably fitted to seize the method of his art. As personages docile, reactionary and middle-class, they were blind to its content of feeling and mutiny, "without which Beylism is an empty form." Not until the decade between 1880 and 1890, as the novelist had foreseen, did a generation emerge capable of divining him through community of heart. Like Stendhal, they were children of *Années Terribles*; after Sedan, as after Waterloo, the life of France was haunted by an obsession of peril, of disaster. Like Stendhal, too, they were generally *déracinés*. Paul Bourget and Maurice Barrès, for example, were middle-class boys uprooted from the provinces and transplanted to Paris; Léon Blum, born in the capital, was a lad of the smaller bourgeoisie who had become estranged from his family environment. With an immediate instinct of the soul they grasped the subject-matter of Stendhal's genius; but they

were careless of, or underrated, his literary science. They placed undue emphasis upon the factor of "Castillianism." Julien Sorel's adamantine ego was an instrument rather than end; it was not flesh, but armour enclosing super-subtle nerves.

Of all the *Rougestes*, as the members of this Stendhalian "church" called themselves after *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Léon Blum was best fitted to see their idol in the round. No hard and fast parallel may be drawn, but there were striking similarities of temperament and circumstance. Even the rôle of Mme Picart was in some degree duplicated by Stendhal's maternal grandfather, Dr. Gagnon. Henri Beyle was a morose and savage child; Léon Blum, a fiery, intractable one. If the Parisian was compared to Antigone and Egeria, the stripling from Grenoble, had, at seventeen, "the look of a young girl," "the delicate nerves and sensitive skin of a woman." Both, to extravagance, were emotionally impressionable; they were at once greedy of affection and morbidly distrustful. Both were flung during adolescence, without preparation, into circles which exact, in normal times, years of toilsome approach. Henri Beyle, in the *salon* of his wealthy cousin, Noël Daru, was torn between "agony of uncouthness and intoxication of conceit." We may imagine the jumble of panic and defiance with which Léon Blum, at nineteen, having skipped all apprenticeship, found himself on terms of poetic equality—in the table of contents at least—with Verlaine, Mallarmé and Swinburne. If his blood possessed slight traces of "Espagnolism," it boasted

something as indomitable —the pertinacious, tough-fibred stamina of Israel. Native endowments of volition and feeling equipped him to penetrate what may be termed the organic aspects of Stendhal's work. Its inorganic elements became decipherable through specialities of his own culture. He, too, was deeply read in the French classics of the eighteenth century ; and his course at the *Faculté du Droit* enlightened him as to the *rationale* of Stendhal's artistic veneration for the Civil Code. What was dark to his fellow *Rougestes* he was thus able to see clearly—that the novelist, for his own individual purposes, was not only an excellent stylist but frequently a great one.

It would be unfair to urge too strict a likeness between the households of Chérubin Beyle, retired advocate, and Auguste Blum, silk merchant. The fanaticism and cruelty of the one providentially were absent from the other. Auguste Blum was not malicious ; neither was he careless of his plighted word. No book was snatched from Léon because it made him laugh. He was not obliged to read *Don Quixote* by stealth. Never was he tempted, as was Stendhal, to hale his father before a jury of "the six greatest men alive," there to hear himself branded as a "scoundrelly miser" and "assassin." But it appears true that each was born into his family as an alien. Auguste Blum did not mount from a pedlar's pack to a prince's purse without a definite tenderness for money ; perhaps he too, like Chérubin Beyle, affected to despise it. Patrician to the last corpuscle, Stendhal was converted into a

lifelong democrat out of sheer reaction from his father's royalism. Lineaments of aristocracy are not wanting in Léon Blum's character ; he became a proletarian leader, one may conjecture, not merely as an outcome of Augier's drama and Lucien Herr's dialectics, but also in revulsion against the capitalist preoccupations of his home. With especial gusto he describes the "idea of genius" which occurred to Henri Beyle at the age of fifteen, and which he put into effect with precocious resolution and secrecy—the idea, namely, that he could escape from Grenoble by dint of mathematics. We are tempted to surmise that Léon's sudden departure from the École Normale was actuated in part by a realization that many years would be required for becoming a professor, while the law furnished a short-cut to economic independence. It must be added that the future novelist, once arrived in Paris, promptly forgot trigonometry, and the entrance examinations at the École Polytechnique ; but that Léon Blum turned his stratagem, if such it was, into the foundation of a settled career.

This is not the place, unluckily, for an exhaustive analysis of his most brilliant volume. My purpose will be fulfilled if the present brief and hasty draft may recommend to Americans a notable example of modern French criticism. But it is difficult to leave the topic without suggesting a few hints of the writer's thought. He quotes—and his disapproval, if any, is tacit—Stendhal's confession that he would prefer, though a faithful republican, "to spend fifteen days of each month in jail rather than live

among the shopkeepers." He insists that Stendhal was the first author to detect that love is not, as Racine appeared to fancy, a phenomenon universally homogeneous ; but that, on the contrary, it is amenable to scientific classification. The novelist himself listed four categories—*l'amour-passion*, *l'amour-goût*, *l'amour-physique* and *l'amour-vanité*. While celebrating the originality of this feature of Beylism, and admitting with Stendhal that *l'amour-passion* is the only form worthy of the name, M. Blum was obliged as a critic to object that *l'amour vanité* can scarcely be regarded as love at all ; that the theorist neglected to define the alteration in a man's love, and particularly in a woman's, after the act of possession ; and that, most strangely, he failed to remember that two sexes exist, each of which loves after a divergent fashion. The biographer maintains that Stendhal, with his "caste of the élite," anticipated Nietzsche's conception of the Superman. Both thinkers agreed that mankind in general is invincibly hostile to original and superior individuals. The German foresaw his *Übermensch* as triumphant, whether in action or the philosopher's cenobitic cave ; his proud moral function is to trample the herd underfoot. Since Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin had not yet put Nietzscheanism into practice, M. Blum considered that the Frenchman was more realistic in painting his "man of the élite" as harassed and persecuted. Like the Superman, he resists the masses to his dying breath ; but the goal is less to stamp his will upon them than to maintain, integral

and impermeable, his essential being. In this sacred task all weapons are lawful. As society is at once strong and malevolent, he will not scruple to wield dissimulation and mendacity.

Thanks to his "Espagnolism," continues M. Blum, Stendhal, a forerunner and giant of Romanticism, held in contempt one of the Cénacle's most typical traits. There is no surer sign of inferiority, he argued, than to confess to the mob that it has been able to cause a wound, or so much as a twinge. "The vanquished," he proclaimed, "do not show their scars." Consequently, in his own words, the outcries of a Lamartine or the imprecations of a Byron are "sovereignly ridiculous." Complaint seemed to him as puerile as vanity. "Instead of luxuriating, like the Romantics, in the evils that had corrupted their century, Stendhal examined and oppugned them. He did not brag of his vexations and pains, or wear his disenchantment like a robe. For him an ill was an ill ; he diagnosed its symptoms and sought to frame a moral therapy that would effect a cure. Romantic dissatisfaction was not in his eyes a creative subject. His will to joy was so robust that he was never heard to exclaim : ' He has suffered ; but what of it ? He has sung.' Like the Brahmin of Voltaire, he was convinced that nothing matters after all save happiness ; for these futile invocations of felicity the poetic outbursts in which they were voiced appeared inadequate recompense. Only through random confidences, through tiny touches, curt and secret, did his Romanticism peer out. He did not flaunt it in

proud variations or blabbing rhymes, in his view mere pomposity and declamation. . . . Stendhal lifted himself above the wailings of Romanticism by an effort of masculinity which a Vigny was later to renew. The expression is more suitable to Vigny than Stendhal, in whom we fail to detect the least self-discipline, the slightest stoic tension. Nothing could be more natural than this lofty sobriety, this monarchic union of reserve and abandon. When, at the beginning of *Henri Brulard*, he embraces his past life with a glance, all bitterness is absent, melancholy infuses itself into the recital with shades almost imperceptible, and the dominant impression is one of tranquillity at ease and half-smiling. . . . He did not take offence because society declines to reward hidden services and useless merits. 'The world,' remarked he, 'pays for the services which it sees. I have never thought that society owed me anything. Helvétius saved me from that titanic folly. . . . Happiness depends on ourselves alone ; should it elude us, we have none but ourselves to blame.' ”¹

The foregoing citation is warranted by the teachings of thought and conduct which Léon Blum obviously learned from such reflections of Stendhal, whom he not only admired but loved. Upon the system of a philosopher so eminent, he may well have hesitated to obtrude his own political ideas. Save for a stress too shrill on the “bourgeois baseness” of the novelist’s home, there is not a particle of evidence to divulge that the book was

¹ *Stendhal et le Beylisme* (pp. 236-240).

written by a Socialist. To speak truly, at this time M. Blum was in danger of coming to regard his creed after the manner of formal Christians, who go to church on Sunday, endure a sermon, drop a coin in the plate and forget the whole matter for a week. He subscribed to *l'Humanité*, paid dues to his party and attended its yearly conventions. He remained intimate with Lucien Herr ; but the librarian, in numerous fields besides that of doctrine, was one of the most learned and intelligent companions to be found in Europe. He dined regularly with Jean Jaurès, at the house of one or the other ; and ran to the Chamber of Deputies whenever the tribune was to speak. But he treasured Jaurès as historian and poet, and probably esteemed his orations as literary rather than political events.

The point to which M. Blum suffered his convictions to grow lukewarm had previously been illustrated by the most uncanonical adventure of his life. At the moment when he was beginning the researches for *Stendhal*, this anointed pacifist indulged in the escapade of fighting a duel. He was not the first Socialist to condescend to an affair of honour. The great Ferdinand Lassalle was shot and killed at Geneva, on August 31, 1864, by a Rumanian, Bojaren Racowicza, the betrothed of Helene von Dönniges. The German messiah quarrelled over a woman ; the French evangelist, over a nicety of theatrical taste. *Une loge pour Faust*, a comedy by Pierre Veber,¹ was presented at the Théâtre des

¹ Pierre-Eugène Veber, born in 1869, was the author, alone or in collaboration, of innumerable comedies and vaudevilles, such as *La dernière grisette*, *La femme au chat* and *Un fils d'Amérique*.

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. Arts. With his usual animation, M. Blum held forth in the lobby on what appeared to him the fatalities of the piece. This was a hazardous amusement in France, where the standard equipment of a journalist combined not merely pen and thesaurus, but sword and pistol. He was overheard by the wrathful playwright, who challenged his censor to mortal combat. The meeting took place at dawn on October 14, 1912, at the Parc des Princes. The weapons were rapiers. M. Blum's seconds were Georges de Porto-Riche and Stéphane Lauzanne, editor of *Le Matin*; those of M. Veber were Serge Basset and Alfred Capus. Both gladiators were slightly hurt during the second bout, the critic in the right hand and the dramatist in the temple. During the third, M. Blum contrived to pierce the other's breast. Sorely but not dangerously wounded, he was carried off to an infirmary. The apostle of peace, triumphant and all but unscathed, was left in command of the ground. It was his first and last *passage d'armes*.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH AND REBIRTH

THE *Life of Stendhal* was placed on sale two weeks after the murder of Franz Ferdinand and his consort at Sarajevo, on June 28, 1914. M. Blum attended the national congress of his party which from July 14 to 16 deliberated at Paris. Though it was a French gathering, delegates arrived from England, Russia, Holland, Belgium and Italy. Germany was represented by Karl Liebknecht. The first sitting was devoted to a proclamation of the unity of all peoples. At the last a resolution, proposed by Jean Jaurès, was adopted urging the general strike, simultaneous and international, as the strongest weapon against militarism and the surest means of forcing upon governments a resort to arbitration. Not until July 24, when Austria-Hungary's ultimatum to Serbia was published, did the Socialists take alarm. Then indeed, while his parliamentary group sat day and night, Jaurès, in a frenzy of despair, multiplied himself into a hundred men. For the second time, as in the Dreyfus Affair, three fateful events now crashed upon Léon Blum's destiny. But they were as bolts of lightning to penny dips—the onrush of the World War, the assassination of Jaurès, the Second International's collapse as an engine of peace.

A philippic against Austria occupied *l'Humanité's* leader of July 25 ; her "aged Emperor," concluded Jaurès, "will be followed, to the bosom of the God whom he invokes, by an immense clamour of hatred,

fury and malediction from the hosts doomed by him to the inferno of war." On the same night, at Lyon, during his last address on French soil, Jaurès mounted to the dangerous candour and perspective of an historian. In a sense, that burst of truth was his death-warrant. Who, demanded he, first kindled the train of imperialism which now threatens to shatter Europe? No other than France, with the seizure of Morocco. Thence arose our complicity in the Italian conquest of Tripoli. We said: "You may rob at one end of the street, since I am filching at the other." Thence came our acquiescence in Austria's grab of Bosnia and Herzegovina; if our own trespasses are to be forgiven, we must pardon the trespasses of others. And where, during the annexation of these provinces, was Russia's boasted love for the Balkan Slavs? It was cradled to sleep with a bribe—the promise, conveniently forgotten afterwards by Austria, of an outlet on the Black Sea, near Constantinople. The orator's climax was interpreted by the opposition as a warning and a menace: "Should the storm break, we, all of us Socialists, will take care to save ourselves in the quickest possible fashion from the crime perpetrated by our rulers."

After three anxious days in Paris, the Socialist leader hurried to Brussels. Léon Blum was on the platform at the Gare du Nord to bid his friend god-speed. It was the last time he saw Jaurès alive. A committee meeting of the Second International, hastily convoked, was held on July 29 in the Belgian

capital. There were representatives not only of Belgium and France, but of England, Russia, Poland, Italy, Denmark, Austria, Spain and Switzerland. From Germany came Rosa Luxembourg and Deputy Hugo Haase of the Reichstag. Victor Adler of Vienna brought word that he and his followers were powerless against the universal desire of Austria for vengeance on the Serbs. But telegrams from Berlin announced that on the night before there had been a Socialist demonstration for peace. "We have begun!" exclaimed Haase. The soul of Jean Jaurès took fire. He remembered an adage of Bebel, that mobilization in Germany would mean revolution. From that instant the French chieftain wrapped himself in a sublime illusion—that the atrocity of a general conflict must not and would not come to pass. With the indignation of his own loyalty, he refused to hear even a suggestion that the Social-Democrats of Germany might not stand fast. Returning to Paris on July 30, he devoted that day and the next to feverish activity on behalf of his policies, which may be summarized as localization of hostilities to Austria and Serbia, peace between France and Germany through concord of the workers of both nations, support of the English programme of mediation, prevention of mobilization in Russia, and, in case of failure at St. Petersburg, pressure on the French government to denounce its alliance with the Tsar's court. During the afternoon of July 31, at the offices of Premier Viviani, he remarked to Abel Ferry, an Under-Secretary of State, that he

would persist in his efforts for peace. On a tone of friendly dissuasion, the other replied : " You will be assassinated at the first street corner."

That evening, at the bureau of *l'Humanité*, Jaurès announced his intention of writing for the next day's number a sort of *J'accuse*, setting forth the responsibilities and motives of the crisis. With several friends he dined at the Restaurant du Croissant, in the Rue Montmartre. They sat at a table on the left of the entrance. As the night was sultry, a window behind him was open. An hour passed. A journalist nearby produced the snap-shot of a baby. Jaurès said with a smile : " May I see it ? " He looked at the picture, asked the child's age and complimented the father. It was 9.40 p.m. There was a roar of shots. With a bullet, fired through the window, in the back of his brain, Jaurès fell. His assailant had been unbalanced by the vituperations which the capitalist press, always insensate against Jaurès, redoubled following his speech at Lyons.

Throughout the night of August 1 Léon Blum sat beside the martyr's bier. Even as he watched, the Socialists of the Reichstag betrayed the dead man's trust by voting unanimously the war credits sought by Bethmann-Hollweg, and joining in the traditional shout of *Hoch der Kaiser* !¹ During the day had been published the French decree of mobilization ; on the next, German hussars were to cross the Republic's eastern boundary, and

¹ Alexandre Zévaès, *Le Parti socialiste de 1904 à 1923* (p. 134).

Armageddon would be loosed. The downfall of a world's hopes rocked the silent mortuary. Upon the grandeur of his master's defeat the disciple mused, and upon his greatness ; he was to declare, long after, that of all the eminent men he had known, Albert Einstein was the one other to stamp so instant an impression of genius. With his endowments of mind and tongue, Jaurès saw beckoning at his feet the path to riches, popularity and power. He turned instead to the road of poverty, hatred such as few public men ever encountered, and now, at last, death. "His pure soul and limpid heart were those of a saint. He was without ambition, pride or vanity. In countless instances he was even juster to his adversaries than to his friends. It is not enough to say that he was disinterested. Never, at any moment, in any form whatsoever, were his thought and action changed or deflected by one of the human motives which despite us, and almost without our knowledge, eternally penetrate us all."¹

These sacred night-thoughts were not unblended, we may be sure, with remorse, since M. Blum's conscience is vivid. During the heat and dust of the conflict, where, pray, since 1905, had he himself stood ? Fastidiously remote, he had loitered in a Tower of Ivory. When the challenge of Jaurès thundered across Europe, he was trilling roulades of rhetoric. While the one, shield to shield, traded strokes with militarism and capital, the other waged war on playwrights and pantaloons.

¹ Léon Blum, *Conférence sur Jean Jaurès*.

His skirmishes were fought at theatres and teas ; his conquests were the farces of a Gavault, the spectacles of a Nanteuil. The teacher cried out for disarmament, and the student pierced a fellow-man with a rapier. Twice had Jaurès besought his friend to stand beside him in the Chamber of Deputies ; and twice Léon Blum refused. From the agonies of that vigil he emerged with no outward change ; but he had undergone a cataclysm of the heart as seismic as a convulsion of religious penitence. The violence of the shock may be estimated from the fact that his dominant instinct, the passion to write, lay for three years benumbed. As a convert holds his unregenerate deeds in abhorrence, Léon Blum thenceforth eyed his æsthetic past with astonishment and alienation. Never again did a literary theme tarnish his pen. He grew so disdainful of style as to permit stenographic records of impromptu speeches to be published among his works. The very constitution of his intellect was altered. The sceptic who had paused, at the midway of battle, to analyse with merciless suspicion the affair of Alfred Dreyfus, now ranged himself beside Pascal, housing logic and creed in compartments mutually hermetic ; and beside Dr. Alexis Carrel, placating in one soul the integrity of science and devout trust in the miracles of Lisieux. But Léon Blum, whatever his torments of conscience, was not the man to lie prostrate under a sense of depravity. He marched forth into the sunrise wearing the aureole of an indomitable vow. He had consecrated his being, as long as he

lived, to the Socialist gospel for which Jean Jaurès perished. With him died Léon Blum the artist ; but Léon Blum the apostle was born beside his hearse. " My life," he remembered in 1930, " changed almost as completely as is possible to a man."¹

Returning from nine years among the fleshpots of literary egotism, the prodigal was welcomed joyously by his co-believers. They made him secretary of their guiding committee, the Socialist group in Parliament ; and the cunning hand which fashioned *Stendhal* subdued itself, as if in reparation, to the drudgery of abstracting reports and keeping minutes. Soon entrance was opened for him into the official life once proffered by Jaurès. Throughout Europe, at the blast of the horn of war, the ramparts of the Second International crumbled. Germany's Social-Democrats yielded to an instinct more anciently rooted than internationalism—the Teuton's immemorial dread and loathing of the Slav. With the tramp of the invader on French soil, the Socialists of the Republic renounced pacifism and plunged headlong into the cause of patriotic defence. Even Jules Guesde, the irreconcilable, accepted a post as Minister without portfolio in the government of *Union sacrée* which was formed on August 26. Albert Thomas was presently to take charge of munitions. Marcel Sembat,² appointed Minister of Public Works,

¹ *Stendhal et le Beylisme* (preface to the second edition).

² Marcel-Étienne Sembat (1862–1922), originally a Blanquist, became one of Jaurès' most brilliant lieutenants in the Chamber of Deputies. Among his writings is a brochure on the post-impressionist painter, Matisse.

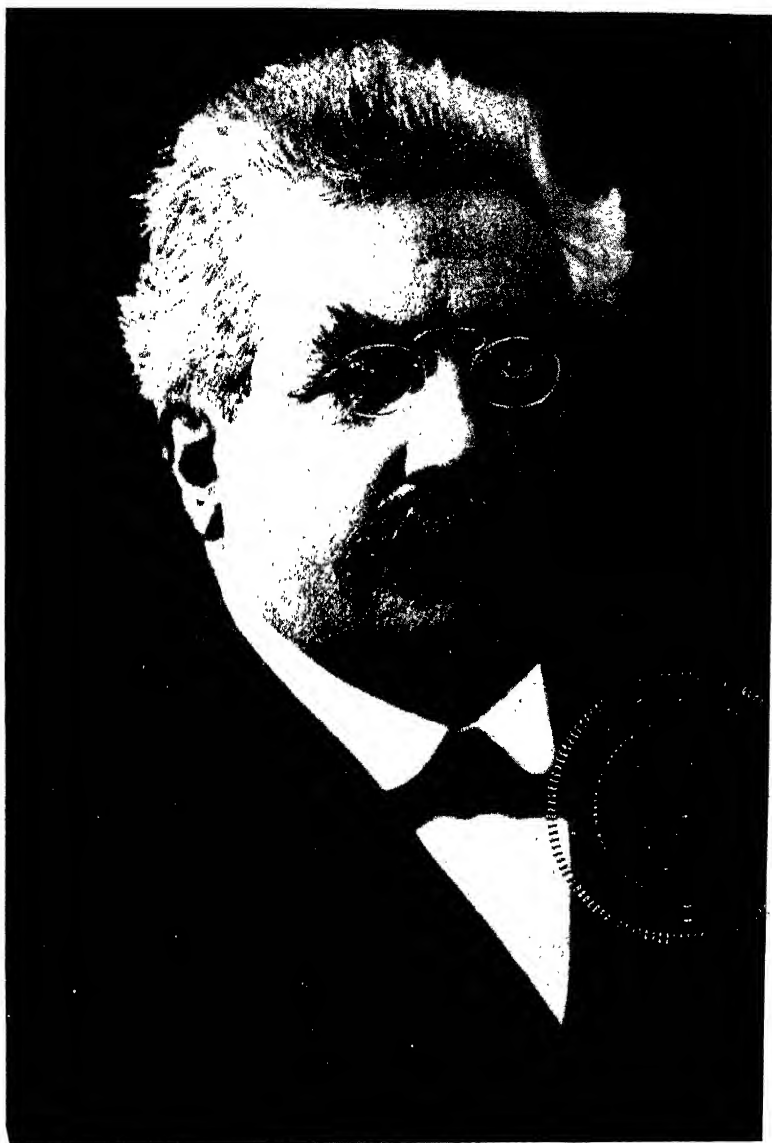
named Léon Blum as his *chef de cabinet*, or executive secretary. It was his first political office. He had no difficulty in reconciling with the memory of Jaurès this connection with a ministry which was not only a bourgeois but a war Cabinet. Like the man in Pascal's *Pensées*, Jaurès balanced measureless idealism with profound practical sense. In the Millerand case he had bequeathed a precedent of adjusting himself to an accomplished fact. Whereas Guesde and Sembat were authorized by their party to join René Viviani's Cabinet, Millerand became Waldeck-Rousseau's Minister of Commerce without consulting his fellow Socialists. Nevertheless, Jaurès insisted on regarding that appointment as an "actuality." If the German invasion was not an actuality, M. Blum and his comrades argued, nothing upon this earth could ever be one.

The secretary's junior brothers were mobilized at the outset of the war, and two of them served throughout its duration. None of the three was wounded. Georges Blum, at the front with the rank of *Aide-major*, was decorated with the Croix de Guerre and made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. René Blum won the Croix de Guerre. During 1915, in the Argonne, Marcel Blum was captured with all his troop. In behalf of the principles for which his brothers had taken arms, Léon Blum found himself almost immediately near the first line of a struggle on civilian terrain. Socialist unity in defence of France continued not quite ten months. As early as May, 1915, the

federation of the Haute-Vienne dispatched to its associate branches a resolution declaring that the party had become tainted with "chauvinism," and urging that an attentive ear be given "to all peace proposals, from whatever source." This idea, the champions of which became known as *Minoritaires*, won favour from the start, and was elaborated into a programme. The official party, of which M. Blum's chief was a commander, held that the Socialists of the Republic had exhausted every device for preventing war, and that their efforts had been sabotaged by the treason of the German proletariat. Internationalism, in the majority's view, should be adjourned till the defeat of the Central Empires. The opposition maintained that all the belligerent nations were guilty, since the true origin of the conflict lay in the capitalist régime itself; and that international relations should be resumed at once, particularly with the Socialists of Germany. Tenacious resistance to the movement was offered by the faction of which M. Blum was a devoted adherent. One concession after another was extorted; but the retreat was so obstinately managed that not until the last months of the war did the *Minoritaires* finally become a majority, and wrest the party machine from the *Social-patriotes*, as they were contemptuously nicknamed.

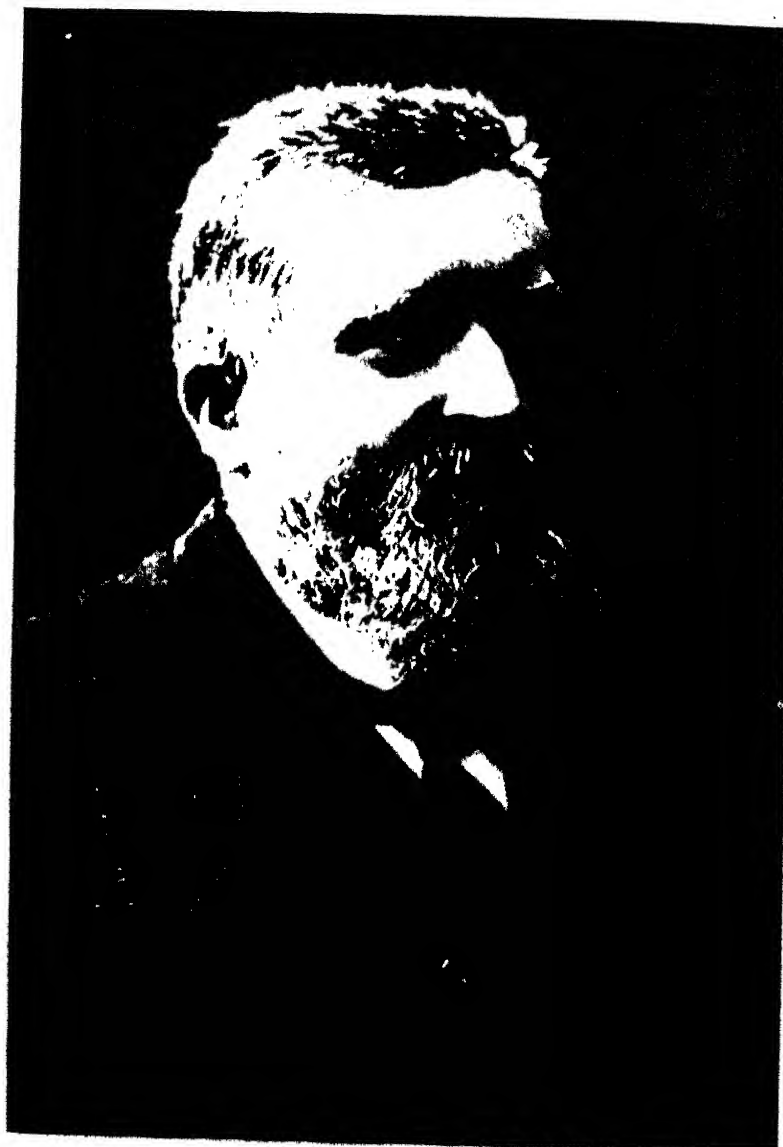
M. Blum's history, from August, 1914, to November, 1917, was that of his party. With its internecine broils he was in closest touch, as confidential lieutenant to Marcel Sembat. Across France, during the autumn of 1915, loomed for the first

time the gigantic shadow of Vladimir Ilyich Lénin. At the village of Zimmerwald, in Switzerland, near the foot of the Jungfrau, was held on September 5-8 the first international gathering of Socialists since the beginning of the war. Two labour union agents, promptly disavowed by their party, represented France ; two Deputies arrived from Germany. Unabashed by the insignificance of his following, Lenin published a manifesto which began : " We, German and French Socialists and syndicalists, affirm that this war is not our war." Though signed by only four men, the document awoke terrific repercussions throughout France. In every department there was agitation on behalf of the " Zimmerwald thesis." In the summer of 1914, the French Socialist party had been unanimously pro-war. By April, 1916, when its National Council assembled, the opposition mustered 960 out of 2965 ballots. In December of that year, at the National Socialist Congress in Paris, Sembat and his associates retained command by a majority of only 130 votes. The Kerensky revolution in Russia, during February, 1917, gave further impetus to the insurgent campaign. A few months afterwards, the French Socialists agreed unanimously to send representatives to a proposed international congress at Stockholm. Alexandre Ribot, who had become Premier, refused passports to the delegates. The rebels were now strong enough to overthrow his ministry, and direct the Socialist Cabinet members to resign. Sembat clung to office during the eight-weeks' ministry of Paul Painlevé ; but



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JEAN JAURÈS

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with the advent of Georges Clemenceau at the Présidence du Conseil, on November 16, he too was forced to give way. Clemenceau offered the Socialists two places in his Cabinet; in vain did Sembat, Herr and Léon Blum entreat the party to accept.¹ When June, 1919, had passed, they were more than ever persuaded of the sagacity of this counsel. With a pair of Socialist Ministers to restrain Clemenceau, they held, the Peace of Versailles would have come nearer the thought of President Wilson. Sembat's resignation terminated M. Blum's activities as *chef de cabinet*. He resumed connections with *l'Humanité*, in a subordinate capacity. Its editors, after Jaurès, were Édouard Vaillant, who died in 1915; and Victor Renaudel, who was ousted—and M. Blum with him—in July, 1918, when the triumphant *Minoritaires* seized the party organ. As its steersman they chose Marcel Cachin, who was from the first a partisan of Lenin and who still to-day, as a Communist, wields the journal's helm.

Was it the Bolshevik revolution of October, 1917, that aroused M. Blum's pen from its long sleep? The dates lend colour to a divination of the sort. Less than two months after that event, on December 1, he published anonymously in *La Revue de Paris* the first of three instalments under the title of *Lettres sur la réforme gouvernementale*. The methods employed by the new proletarian régime, in the hallowed name of Socialism, had outraged his profoundest sensibilities. Ten years later he con-

¹ Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*.

fessed himself unable to guarantee his own calmness and impartiality on the subject. He branded Communism as a heresy of Socialism, like Manichæism or Arianism in the Catholic Church. "No one," affirmed he, "can estimate the retardement it has imposed on the final emancipation of the workers . . . the evil it has done is irreparable."¹ In the eyes of this humanitarian and liberal of the Jaurist school, the Soviet leaders betrayed the "true church" by substituting dictatorship for representative government, denying freedom of action and thought, persecuting non-conformity with savage barbarity, and staining a pure cause with the crimes of terrorism and massacre. Yet the vortical energy of the Marxian triumph was such that it threatened, in 1917 and for years afterwards, to swallow up the entire Socialist movement of France. The counterstroke undertaken by M. Blum, perhaps as yet only instinctively, seems at first glance as irrelevant as his exit from the Dreyfus Affair in the rôle of a theatrical reviewer. But a moment's thought suggests that he was inspired, even if unawares, by sound and far-gazing logic. The one virtue of Communism, he remarked in the brochure just cited, was that it compelled Socialism to re-examine the very foundations of its theory. The object of both sects was identical—the destruction of the capitalist order. They differed as to method alone. The constitutional and irenic procedure advocated by the Socialists was based syllogistically

¹ Léon Blum, *Bolchevisme et socialisme*, 1928.

on the competence of the democratic scheme. If that premise were invalidated, nothing would remain but to adopt the Bolshevik programme of violence. Unfortunately, the French Parliament's inertia and futility, especially during the war, had been such as to strike M. Blum himself with "a species of terror." In a moment of disgust, Marcel Sembat had gone so far as to write and circulate a book with the title: *Make a King or Make Peace!*¹

Though he had never been a member of the Chamber of Deputies, M. Blum could flatter himself that he knew it as intimately as Sembat. From youth he had been an *habitué* of the Palais Bourbon. Jules Renard observed long before that his friend was "strongly attracted to politics; he knows the Deputies by their votes."² He had, indeed, promptly shaken off all glamour concerning that historic assembly. One afternoon the playwright and he sat in its gallery, Renard for the first time. He pretended alarm. "I've wasted my life," he muttered. "The men yonder—are they so very superior to artists?" The future Deputy grinned. "It's as easy to outstrip most of the men here," he replied, "as it is usual to have more talent in art than Nion or Maizeroy."³ As he had asked in the case of matrimony, however, was electoral government in itself a fatal institution, or was it an experiment which had been disastrously bungled? The

¹ Marcel Sembat, *Faites un roi sinon faites la paix!*

² *Journal inédit*, May 1, 1902.

³ *Idem*, February 6, 1903.

more he reflected, the more inclined was M. Blum to think the latter. As a consequence his first book in four years,¹ enlarged from the epistles to *La Revue de Paris*, proved to be in effect, if not of deliberate purpose, a demonstration as to how the French parliamentary instrument could be made safe for Socialism.

If in nothing more, the volume would be extraordinary as a feat of intellectual abstraction. Written partly as the last German offensive shook the Allied barricade, published as the author's confederates were routed and the passions soon to cleave his party stormed to the skies, it is as impersonal, as coldly detached, as a monograph of denumerative geometry. It is a record not of political emotion but political technique. In a community subject to typhoid, as it were, the writer becomes an expert hygienist, armed with microscope, test tubes and chemicals; he analyses the water supply and inspects the drainage. The gravity of the situation is not concealed. "I know of few spectacles so afflicting as that of parliamentary life."² Sure remedies, however, are available—daring, perhaps, but simple and well-nigh obvious. "All the reforms I have suggested . . . may be realized practically and almost at once. Not one proposes the least violation of our constitutional and organic charters. Not one exacts a price beyond thought and resolution."³

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale*, published anonymously in 1918.

² *Idem* (pp. 155 and 26).

³ *Idem* (p. 26).

Among the chief sources of legislative chaos in France, continues he, is the Senate's privilege of indefinite delay in acting upon statutes submitted by the Chamber. There is no wish to destroy the veto of the Upper House, which embodies, under French law, the sole check on the popular assembly's omnipotence. But government is paralysed when the Senate can postpone, for years, consideration of a measure originated by the Cabinet and upheld by a majority of the Chamber ; or, what is worse, when it nullifies the Bill by refusing to act upon it at all and burying it in a pigeon-hole. Why not adopt a rule, pleaded M. Blum, requiring the Senate, within two or three months, to pass upon all ordinances transmitted by the Chamber ? A second vice of French government is instability ; fortunate is the Cabinet which endures more than three months. The records of the Third Republic show that in nine cases out of ten the ministry's fall was precipitated by its own demand upon the Chamber for a vote of confidence, almost invariably regarding some lesser item of policy. Why not reserve these challenges for major questions ? Better still, why should the Cabinet resign at all, unless, as in England, a vote of censure has first been initiated and carried by the opposition ? It should be remarked that M. Blum, as Premier, deferred claiming a show of confidence till he had been six months in office, and then on the capital issue of neutrality in the Spanish civil war. His administration came at that within a breath of defeat. The Communists refused to vote, and all

would have been lost had not reinforcements dashed to the rescue from groups of the Centre that normally were hostile.

These are two instances of professional craft from a work which is a veritable handbook of applied political science. But its supreme characteristic is one which allows us to deduce that the writer's capacity for state affairs is ingenerate, like the talent of a musical prodigy. It is the unconscious prevision, the clairvoyance, with which the author's hand traces the exact processes of his own future. Within those fascinatingly prophetic covers we may rehearse, as at a preview, the strategy destined to raise Léon Blum and his followers to empire. The secret is disclosed, eighteen years in advance, as to how his administration would prove capable of surviving a series of convulsions like the occupational strikes, the Spanish war and the devaluation of the franc, either of which would have brought the typical French Cabinet to grief. In the pages of 1918 was solved the mystery of 1936, when the French Parliament started up from its long stupor and accomplished in seventy days such a volume of profound and far-reaching legislation as it had not before dispatched in sixty years. The only sorcery appears to have been that M. Blum, like Stendhal treating phases of motion, attacked a modern political problem with the methods of observation and analysis which the teachers of both, Condillac and Helvétius, applied to the riddles of nature.

France is bedevilled, the argument opens, by ministries incapable of rule and parliaments unable

to function. Yet, under its system, competent government is impracticable save through these organs—a Premier of recognized ascendancy and a faithful, disciplined majority. What, however, is the traditional procedure when a Cabinet falls? The President of the Republic consults with the retiring Prime Minister, the presidents of Senate and Chamber and two or three of those elder statesmen whom dignity or sloth has perched above quarrels and ambition. At last a name is chosen, frequently a surprising one. It happens to be a certain man, and just as well could be another. The nominee confers with Senators and Deputies—that is, he seeks to find whether it is possible, by hook or crook, from this quarter and that, to drum up a temporary majority. If successful, he becomes Prime Minister, and is greeted, because he is new, with urbanity and goodwill. Minister and Parliament eye each other with curiosity and graciousness. But soon the novelty wears off. In a few weeks or months the Chamber starts to sulk because the newcomer differs so slightly from the man he displaced, and the Minister discovers that with this spiteful and bickering Parliament “it is impossible to govern.” The last break never is due to a momentous issue; as in wedlock, it is commonly some tiny pique. “Ministerial crises belong, with us, to the order of domestic rows. They are connected with chronic incompatibility of temper, and spring from embitterment of feeling in a mutual atmosphere of boredom, monotony and impotence.”¹

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale* (pp. 19–20).

Why did this Premier, like his forerunners, so quickly fail? Because he was not "a real, living Minister, supported by a true and viable majority." Thus we arrive at the pivotal maxim of M. Blum's theory: "Parties should not create government, but government should create parties." In other words, the leader must recruit his majority not after but before his appointment to office. This is no task of a few hurried hours. It demands, on the contrary, like a corporation fashioning its personnel, many years of steadfast, intensive organization. It requires a period of labour and combat shared together, of trust given and taken, of leadership and obedience grown through trial into familiar habits. Not that the chieftain should be a despot and his followers servile tools. Their loyalty is based on voluntary and rational submission to the statesman's tested qualities of mind, will and character—for his primacy should be moral as well as cerebral. When at last he becomes ruler, the choice is made not by hazard but through logical necessity. As with Clemenceau in 1917 and Waldeck-Rousseau in 1899, the office merely ratifies an authority actually possessed. Such a Premier finds himself in command of a legislative majority which no gust of irritation can capsize, and which the utmost storm of events is unable to shatter. With a resolute hand at the wheel, the parliamentary ship, but a moment ago floundering on the waves, suddenly answers the helm, strikes into a definite course and voyages, straight and swift, to its purposed harbour.

An impressive and not to say startling conception of the Prime Minister's powers was formulated in this volume, years before M. Blum can so much as have dreamed of ever occupying the position. At one moment the exclamation was wrung from him : "Parliament yearns for a master !" He used the word, it was quickly added, "in the sense of a schoolmaster, or ballet-master."¹ On another page he was less diplomatic. "Let us inure ourselves," he exhorted, "to beholding in the Prime Minister that which he is, or should be—a monarch. A monarch whose lines of action have been traced in advance, a monarch temporary and constantly subject to recall ; but one who, so long as the confidence of Parliament gives him life, is invested with the totality of executive power, and concentrates in himself all the vital forces of the nation."² These passages were no mere exercise of sensational oratory. They were left untouched when M. Blum, in one of his earliest acts after reaching the *Présidence du Conseil*, ordered that particular book republished. What is more, he implemented it for the first time with his signature. Thus he served warning upon the country that he proposed, within legal bounds, to reign as a true king of France. But in 1918 Léon Blum was not Premier ; he was not even, as yet, a member of the Chamber of Deputies.

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale* (p. 164).

² *Idem* (p. 28).

CHAPTER IX

SECOND BATTLE OF TOURS

ONE of the most unpromising figures that ever braved the Paris hustings was put forward by the Socialist Party, early in 1919, as a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies. It is hardly clear even now why Léon Blum was elected. His apparent shortcomings, to be true, were far from such in reality. He was of course a Jew ; but anti-Semitism, outside a clamorous minority, is rare in France. He was not a working-man ; but the French proletariat for generations, from Robespierre to Jaurès, had been accustomed to accepting leadership at the hands of recruits from the bourgeoisie. If he was an intellectual of palest dye, the authors, artists and savants of the Republic are traditionally radical ; while the masses, sprung from a tribe given less to intuition than logic, feel nothing of the Anglo-Saxon's distrust of mental brilliance. His fortune, always swollen in public regard to legendary millions, impressed the artisans of the capital, a reasoning fauna, as proof of sincerity. His " patriotic " course during the war, which after all was that of a subordinate, not a principal, no doubt resulted in as much good as harm, for the elections of 1919 had more than a tinge of horizon blue. On the other hand, he was almost completely unknown to the multitude, which had never heard of the *Réflexions critiques* or the biography of Stendhal. With the marks of the scholastic cloister still upon him, he was seeking elective office for the first time ;

he had the somewhat ridiculous air of a middle-aged amateur, an apprentice of forty-seven. He was no throbbing oratorical baritone like Aristide Briand ; his voice was unresonant and tuneless. Unlike Clemenceau, he was scarcely a personage in whom men instinctively recognize a master. He had charm, but only with intimate circles ; on the platform he lost all vestige of magnetism. His speech, never colloquial, was a pure and literary French. He seemed unaware of the passionate combustibles that lay ready, in the hearts of his audiences, for the mere stroke of a match ; he offered no bids to caste hatred, covetousness and revenge. His favourite topics were abstractions, like reason and justice ; at times he quoted mysterious beings named Pascal and Shakespeare. He would not have known how to slap a voter on the back or kiss a baby. He summoned the populace to a task for most of us repellent—that of exerting not their arteries but their minds. Perhaps the word spread that he had been the best-loved companion of Jaurès. Perhaps his earnestness and integrity from the start imposed themselves on general conviction. At any rate, elected he was. Moreover, the same constituency, one of the reddest in France, for nine years loyally kept him in office. Not until 1928 did it forsake his meagre diet for the lustier board of a Communist.

While he was wooing the suffrages of Paris after his own quaint fashion, an upheaval in Moscow determined his policy for years to come. A perspective of three-quarters of a century is needed to

grasp the significance of the Communist International, and Léon Blum's part in bringing about its discomfiture in France. During 1862 a World's Fair was held in London. Capitalist newspapers, such as the Paris *Temps*, conceived the notion that international relations and French industry would profit if Gallic working-men were sent abroad to view with their own eyes the wonders of British manufacture. Popular subscriptions were raised; Napoleon III, to his subsequent regret, donated 37,000 francs. No less than 760 artisans, from all sections of the Republic, voyaged across the Channel. They duly admired the Anglo-Saxon's machinery; but they encountered something of more breath-taking fascination—the English labour unions. From their visit sprang an organization called the International Working-men's Association, which was founded in London on September 28, 1864, and which is commonly designated as the First International. At the beginning it was controlled by a brotherly faith called "mutualism," which had been expounded by Proudhon. But Karl Marx, an exile in London, became a member, and as early as 1869 contrived to substitute for the Frenchman's pacific philosophy his own warlike creed. Then he set about purging the organization of his doctrinal enemies. When the congress of 1872 met at The Hague, he was finally powerful enough to expel or provoke the resignations of Vaillant, Bakounine and a crowd of others. The membership was purified, the treatment was successful; but it killed the patient. Marx had strenu-

ously championed the Paris Commune. Public feeling in England was outraged by its murder of the Archbishop of Paris and destruction of historical monuments, including the Tuileries Palace and Hôtel de Ville. Prudence counselled that the association's headquarters be removed from London to New York. There it lingered four years, and in 1876 expired at Philadelphia.

The Second, or Socialist-Labour, International was organized in Paris in July, 1889. It was not, strictly speaking, Marxist. The German was recognized as a major prophet, but not as sole redeemer. Its mild theology permitted the worship of numerous inferior saints—like François-Noël Babeuf (1764–1797), theoretician and martyr of the Reign of Terror ; and Robert Owen (1771–1858), founder of the co-operative movement in England and a model community at New Harmony, Ind. It strove to embrace all systems ; for example, men as diverse as Guesde and Jaurès were captains equally honoured. The Second International vowed war to the death on militarism, capitalism and the bourgeois State ; in practice, its temper was opportunist, liberal and reformist, as opposed to doctrinaire, intransigent and revolutionist. Among its types were Jean Jaurès of France, James Ramsay MacDonald of England, Victor Adler of Austria, Émile Vandervelde of Belgium, Karl Hjalmar Branting of Sweden and Ferdinand August Bebel, Karl Kautsky and Wilhelm and Karl Liebknecht of Germany. It functioned regularly, prosperously and on the whole fraternally for twenty-five

years, until it was dismembered by the World War.¹

An outstanding characteristic of early Bolshevism was that its enmity to capital was no more inflamed than its abhorrence of the Second International, which it accused of monstrous treason to the proletariat and complicity in the wholesale slaughter of the war. Determined to cleanse even their name of that odious kinship, the Russian leaders dropped the title of Social-Democrats and resorted to a word employed by Marx and Friedrich Engels in their manifesto of 1848, and since fallen into disuse. They re-styled themselves "Communists"—intending to denote collectivism in its most revolutionary and scientific form. During March, 1919, Lenin founded the Third and Communist International—or Comintern, for short.² It was exclusively and fanatically Marxist. At once it plunged into the task of extirpating every remnant of the older organization. The folly of that programme of civil war has been revealed by the utter ruin of both Communists and Socialists in Austria, Hungary, Italy and Germany. But the prestige of the Slavic dictatorship was such at the time that it appeared on the verge of sweeping all Europe before it. The

¹ It was reconstituted at Hamburg during May, 1923, at a convention attended by 630 delegates from thirty countries. They laid claim to 7,000,000 members.

² A party called *Deuxième et demie*, or International Second-and-a-Half, was organized at Vienna in 1921; it rejected both the Second and Third Internationals. It relapsed two years later into the Second. Léon Trotsky's insurgence against Stalinism is known in France as the Fourth International.

official Socialist bodies of Hungary, Switzerland and Italy repudiated the Second International and proclaimed their adhesion to the Third. Similar action was taken by formidable groups of other countries, Germany in particular. The Socialists of France, meeting at Strasbourg during February, 1920, voted by a majority of 4330 to 337 for retirement from the Second International. But the minority was resourceful enough to extort a compromise. By 3000 ballots against 1600, the question of joining the Comintern was postponed to a national congress set for the following winter at Tours.

From the beginning Marcel Sembat, Léon Blum and their companions vehemently opposed the absorption of French Socialism by Moscow. As students of history, they rejected the thesis that Socialism had burst, full-panoplied and new under the sun, from the brains of Marx and Engels in 1848 ; they were aware of the indebtedness of both men to radical precursors in France and the Owenite and Chartist schools of Great Britain. As strategists, they deplored Bolshevism's stress upon the technique of revolution, and its reliance on force, material and immediate, as the sole arm of popular emancipation. The use of that weapon in Tsarist Russia, they acknowledged, may or may not be vindicated by time ; but as for France, the Revolution's superlative lesson was that conquest of power by the masses, before they are prepared to wield and defend it, can result only in the triumph of counter-action. As moralists, they condemned the Islamic

intolerance apparently native to Marxism;¹ its emphasis on economic determinism, to the neglect of the spiritual aspects of Socialism; and beyond all as they alleged, its corruption of the working classes through their daily tutelage in unconcern as to means, and in "treachery, espionage, hatred and systematic calumny."² As philosophers, they denied that Socialism represented a sharp, integral break with the past; they preferred to view it as the synthesis, the climax, of European civilization. They were proud to confess that it drew inspiration from the world-state of classic Rome, the international theocracy which the Catholic Church sought to erect in the Middle Ages, the cosmopolitan republic of art and letters created by the Renaissance, the humane and democratic movements of the eighteenth century, and even the giant cartels evolved by modern capitalism. Lastly, as Frenchmen—for internationalism has never freed itself of racial undertows³—they protested against the sub-

¹ M. Blum could personally recall an instance of Marxomania from his early years with the Bellais-Péguy publishing house. One of the projects was a commentary on the Communist Manifesto, in which it was observed that the German thinkers were under obligation to English and French Socialism. The astonished author was assailed with broadsides of insult in *Die Neue Zeit*, which charged him with impugning the originality of Marx. When a reply was attempted, the journal refused to print it. "Herr and Jaurès were struck with consternation."—Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr*.

² Léon Blum, *Bolchevisme et socialisme*.

³ "My patriotism," said Blum, "is that sung by Hugo in his *Châtiments*; it dreams of the suppression of all patriotisms. But I am proud of being a Frenchman, on account of a heri-

mission of their country to any foreign power, whether Russia or Germany. Jaurès, Herr, Sembat and Léon Blum had never been Marxists ; they were sons of the French Revolution and Paris Commune, of Voltaire, Babeuf, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon and Blanqui. They were not likely to forget that Socialism existed in France before Karl Marx was born.

Armed with this array of convictions, the champions of the Second International presented themselves at the Congress of Tours, which assembled on December 20, 1920, and deliberated for six days. Their fate would have been ignominious rout, had not their hands been strengthened by the most unforeseen of allies—the hierarchs of Moscow themselves. These statesmen had seen fit, during the interval, to publish two documents : the text of twenty-one conditions under which entrance to the Third International would be tolerated ; and an open letter from the Executive Committee of the Comintern to “ all members of the French Socialist Party.” Among the conditions were absolute obedience to the Third International and its Executive Committee ; expulsion of all reformist members from posts of responsibility ; espousal of “ clandestine ” and “ illegal ” agitation, such as propaganda in the army ; and periodical purgations to rid the membership of “ petty-bourgeois ” elements. The letter supplied reading still more

tage of ideas which perhaps I should not have possessed had I been English or German.”—Jules Renard, *Journal inédit*, May 17, 1899.

unpalatable. The Socialists of France were informed that "nowhere, unless in Germany, was Socialism more vilely betrayed during the war than in your country"; and that the behaviour of scoundrels like Renaudel, Sembat and Jean Longuet "was no better than the treasonous and ignoble conduct of Scheidemann and Noske in Germany." Albert Thomas and Léon Jouhaux, secretary of the Confédération Générale du Travail—corresponding to the American Federation of Labour—were singled out for excommunication as "infamous traitors." Nevertheless, by a majority of 3208 to 1022, the Congress voted to enter the Third International.

Bolshevism at that instant held proletarian France in the hollow of its hand; a Communist government might to-day rule in Paris had not the Muscovites chosen to react with a message in the tone of a master. It bore the names of Lenin, Trotsky and other worthies of the Comintern; but is usually labelled, from its first signer, as "the Zinovieff telegram," or "the bullet of Zinovieff." The Congress was felicitated on having beheld the true light, and was ordered to evict forthwith from its bosom Paul Faure, Jean Longuet and "their group of reformists and semi-reformists." Faure countered with the tale of a Russian Socialist, Rappoport, who desired to travel from Moscow to Paris. For motives of poverty or scruple, he determined to pay no railway fare. He mounted a train without a ticket, and was booted off by a guard at the first station. Nothing daunted, he boarded the next train that passed, and at the second station was flung

out with blows. By dint of innumerable thwacks, at last he reached his destination. "We are invited to make the same trip," said Faure; "in the opposite direction, it is true, but under conditions identically humiliating."¹ A resolution was offered declaring that the Socialists of France refused to obey Russia's mandate, and affirmed their loyalty to the Second International. The motion was rejected, by 3427 to 1389. Thereupon the faction represented by Sembat, Faure, Longuet and Léon Blum seceded from the Congress, which fell apart in two embattled cults—the Socialists, or French Section of the Workers' International (S.F.I.O.); and the Communists, or French Section of the Communist International (S.F.I.C.). Such was the famous Scission of Tours,² where Charles Martel, a thousand years earlier, had beaten off another Asiatic invasion of zealots.

As we have seen, the unity of the labouring classes formed a motive so dominant with M. Blum as to have dictated at one crisis his departure from militant Socialism, and at another, his return. Yet we find him, at Tours, active in a group which seized the initiative in rending the workers asunder. At the core of his temperament, the solution is, resided instincts which were even more commanding, and which he had noted in himself as a boy—love of justice and hatred of tyranny. Except for

¹ Alexandre Zévaès, *Le Parti socialiste de 1904 à 1923* (p. 202.)

² It was followed the next year by a corresponding division of labour unions. For fifteen years thereafter the Confédération Générale du Travail was opposed by a Communist body, styling itself the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire.

“the bullet of Zinovieff,” no doubt he would have yielded to the majority and become an ornament of the Third International—with pregnant consequences for the future. If he could never have grown a dutiful Communist, he would have waged his polemics inside that party and not without it. The Moscow telegram, however, appeared to him so intolerably unjust, so gratuitously arbitrary, as to leave no recourse save defiance. Yet his heart turned sick as he gazed upon the wreckage. Its moral havoc was first to strike him—so many friendships converted on a sudden to enmity, so many comrades estranged who had fought in the same ranks, under one flag. The objective loss was equally disastrous. The Communists at Tours outnumbered the Socialists; as a majority, they became the official group, the lawful heir of the party finances and machinery. Paris for a space had virtually no Socialist organization. The victors retained control of the national journal, *l'Humanité*. They bore off from the parent stem a troop of young, fiery and combative spirits. The task of replacement was herculean; by a whimsy of fortune it devolved almost at once upon the æsthetic hands of Léon Blum. He had been so far from prominence at Tours that not even his name appears in the chronicle of Alexandre Zévaès, for whom the mark-worthy figures were Sembat, Longuet, Faure, Jouhaux and Thomas.¹ Yet, four years later, he

¹ M. Blum nevertheless delivered a speech at Tours which was printed as a pamphlet in 1934 by order of the Permanent Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, under the title of *Pour la vieille maison*.

was elected President of the Socialist Party, and acceded to the position which Jaurès himself had secured only at a cost of half a lifetime of travail. Though the former was long since dead, Karl Marx and Léon Blum stood at last brow to brow—both of them world Jews, but the one proletarian and the other patrician. Whereupon something resembling thaumaturgy came to pass. The bookish anchoret, the subtle dilettante, the novice but five years in Parliament, was revealed as the first authoritative commander French Socialism had produced in ten years, since the death of Jean Jaurès.

His rise from nameless lieutenant to general-in-chief, in the phenomenally short period between 1920 and 1924, was aided by external events, among them a pair of first-class Socialist funerals. Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat died in 1922. The former, at seventy-seven, was no longer terrifying, but his ascendancy remained potent. He had founded, inspired and given his name to the largest and best disciplined of the Socialist denominations. Guesdism perished with its apostle. As an ex-Cabinet officer and prime swordsman of the mutiny at Tours, Sembat would have been the logical candidate for chieftainship. Among their survivors, Renaudel and Thomas had been discredited as leaders—for opposite causes. The one was considered despotic, and the other unforceful. Thomas deserted French politics in 1920 to become head of the Labour Bureau of the League of Nations. Faure and Longuet were primarily journalists.

Léon Jouhaux, as a union leader, was barred from official statesmanship. In 1921, moreover, occurred the death of Auguste Blum. All that he represented, all he had accomplished, was menaced, as he quite understood, by Léon's beliefs. But Auguste, too, was a just man, and refrained from disinheriting his Socialist son. It can hardly have been sheer coincidence that Léon Blum's name was unfurled just then at the masthead of *Le Populaire*, a Socialist sheet of two pages which for five years had been starving in the capital. It was scheduled to publish every afternoon, but had been able to print no more than an average of one number in three days. Faure was editor-in-chief; the departments of politics and literature were in the respective care of Longuet and Henri Barbusse. After a week's warning, *Le Populaire*, on April 8, 1921, doubled its size to four pages and began appearing regularly every morning. Improvements even thus modest exact cash, such as M. Blum had recently inherited. A salutatory article, doubtless from his pen, acknowledged that a certain sum of capital, "relatively small," had been needed to launch the journal in its new form. Prospective subscribers were assured, however, that "all the stock is owned by comrades of the party." He and Longuet, who had been collaborators on the initial staff of *l'Humanité*, were jointly proclaimed as directors of politics. War was declared forthwith upon Communism and "its detestable spirit of division and tyranny." In the issue of April 9 was published M. Blum's first signed editorial. It was an attack on Premier

Briand's policy of "the clenched fist" in the Rhineland. At once *Le Populaire* took the place it has since occupied, that of official organ of the S.F.I.O. As M. Blum became after a space sole political editor, signing the gazette's daily leader, he found himself the national journalistic spokesman of his party.

He had become also its recognized mouthpiece in the Chamber of Deputies. We have observed that he was far from an elocutionist. Stendhal's disdain of "verbalism" had helped him in 1918 to formulate the maxim that "oratory is merely a luxury."¹ But he was a practised public speaker. He had taken courses in declamation at the Lycée Charlemagne, pleaded for a quarter-century before the Conseil d'État and been for many years a favourite lecturer. Though his utterance carried with difficulty to the press gallery,² he soon became known as the Chamber's most formidable debater—thanks to his courage, his ready tongue, the promptness and vigour of his intelligence and his store of precise information in a hundred fields. The conservative Paris *Temps* was later to find this one consolation in his appointment as Premier—that no longer would there be in Parliament a Léon Blum to interpellate the government. Despite the peculiar deadliness of his attacks, he won the respect even of his victims. In the utmost heat of controversy he maintained Renan's impeccable urbanity

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale* (p. 126).

² "Naturally I have a very weak voice."—Léon Blum, *Pour la vieille maison*.

and he had acquired from Jaurès the practice of showing still greater fairness to an adversary than to an ally. His opinions were hateful to a majority of his colleagues, but he achieved now and then a triumph of popularity and applause. Should a Deputy, undertaking a literary reference, prove so unlucky as to misquote or misattribute the passage, it was Léon Blum who sprang to his feet, identified author and work, and declaimed not only the exact line but its context of a page or two of volleying alexandrines. Being Celtic, the Chamber rejoices in such asides of erudition.

Missionary and constructive labours occupied the Socialist president from 1924 to 1936. The chores of party reorganization are scarcely exciting. Of still less profit to an explorer would be the dreary, interminable wrangles waged by M. Blum and his opponents with so much hubbub that the existence of their common enemy passed out of mind. To collectivist rage for schism capital in France undoubtedly owes its long reprieve from execution. Suffice it to chronicle that the Marxist majority at Tours was seven to four ; and that fifteen years later, on the eve of the Popular Front election, the Socialists outnumbered their rivals ten to one in the Chamber, with 101 Deputies to ten Communists. Of superior moment was M. Blum's strategy, resolute and judicious, for the conquest of government by the Socialist Party. The science through which a despot usurps power was formulated by Machiavelli. With his treatise on reform, M. Blum laid down the method under which rule in a demo-

cracy may be grasped by a proletarian cult. The broad policy of his leadership followed principles which far in advance had been studied through. As we shall find, however, the victory of 1936 caught him unawares ; for his basic programme, that of constituting in Parliament a majority not only sovereign but homogeneous, still remained incomplete.

In one respect, curious but important, his preparation was fulfilled. Almost three decades earlier, with acute practical instinct, he noted that the life of a party may depend on its staff of monetary and legal technicians. The Republicans, observed he, after losing every trace of idealistic vitality and popular confidence, survived their own decease for ten years, because their personnel included the only specialists in France "competent to interpret a financial statute, draft a penal text or frame a customs tariff."¹ When he wrote *La Réforme gouvernementale*, he had come to perceive that a faction preparing to reign should likewise have fore-armed itself with administrative experts, with men qualified to manage huge departments—that is to say, Cabinet officers. The prospective Ministers, according to his theory, must have served in the Chamber of Deputies. Lacking that experience, "it is questionable whether any one can so much as grasp the idea of ministerial responsibility to Parliament."² Lieutenants of both sorts, technical and executive, he had chosen, trained and inducted,

¹ *Nouvelles conversations* (May 25, 1898).

² *La Réforme gouvernementale* (p. 122).

if necessary, into the Chamber—with so much reserve, if not secrecy, that it is beguiling to remember the consternation of the Embassies in Paris when the roster of his new government came into their hands. For a generation the defeat of a Cabinet had meant little more than a reshuffling of portfolios among the same political stalwarts. But this preposterous schedule made virtually a clean sweep. Out of thirty-five names exactly two, beside that of the Premier, were familiar—Camille Chautemps, Minister of State ; and Édouard Daladier, Secretary of National Defence. A few were vaguely recognizable as having figured in the Chamber, such as Roger Salengro, Secretary of the Interior ; Vincent Auriol, Minister of Finance ; and Yvon Delbos, Secretary for Foreign Affairs. But who, in the sacred name of routine, were F. Blancho, Secretary of the Navy ; Pierre Cot, Minister of Air ; Jean Zay, Secretary of National Education ; Albert Bedouce, Minister of Public Works ; Georges Monnet, Secretary of Agriculture ; and Paul Bastid, Minister of Commerce ? Worst of all, among these upstarts were three women, when it was notorious that in France females are not even suffered to vote.¹

¹ They were Mme Joliot-Curie, Under-Secretary of State for Scientific Research, who later resigned ; Mme Brunschvicg, Under-Secretary of State ; and Mme S. Lacorre, Under-Secretary of State for Child Protection. Only four appointees, including the three women, were non-parliamentarians. The other was M. Blum's journalistic colleague, Paul Faure, who became a Minister of State. In addition to the Premier, two of his official family are Jews—Mme Brunschvicg and Marc

M. Blum had once been astonished that Jean Jaurès found opportunity to write a history of the French Revolution. He was now to discover that it is precisely the busiest man who can snatch time for extra work. Like Jaurès, he himself, during this period, was absorbed in journalistic and legislative toil, and dashed about France without cease at the behest of his party. Yet there sprayed from his pen a fountain of propagandist brochures, and two full-length volumes.¹ To the Librairie Populaire, a publishing enterprise connected with his newspaper, he contributed such pamphlets as *Pour être socialiste*, in 1919; *Pour les élections législatives de mai* and *Bolchevisme et socialisme*, in 1928; during 1930, *Radicalisme et socialisme* and *Commentaire sur le programme d'action du parti socialiste*; in 1932, *Notre tactique électorale*; in 1935, *Le socialisme devant la crise*; and in 1936, *Le socialisme a vu clair*. The first book was an address to the newly restored citizens of Alsace-Lorraine; it was published in 1923 at Mulhouse in the German language, with the title: *Wer ist Socialist? ein Wort an Junge und Alte*. M. Blum did not compose it in German, but in French, and caused it to be translated. He has owned

Rucart, Minister of Justice. So that *l'Action Française* exaggerates in referring constantly to M. Blum's government as "the Ministry of the Talmud" and "this Cabinet of Israelite apes."

¹ Half a dozen articles on educational reform which appeared between 1921 and 1930 in *La Revue de Paris* and which are attributed in the catalogues to Léon Blum the statesman, were obviously composed by his unfortunate "double" at the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly.

regretfully that the linguist's knack is not his. Despite extensive reading in German and English literature, he has never been at ease in writing or speaking either language. The only tongue outside French in which he has found it possible to become fluent is Latin. His second volume, *Les problèmes de la paix*, was issued in 1931. It enjoys the distinction of being his only work that has been translated into English. A version by Alexander Werth, with an introduction by Robert Dell, was published in London in 1932 under the title of *Peace and Disarmament*.

For several months of 1928 M. Blum, through no will of his own, was absent from the Chamber. During the spring he was defeated in Paris by a Communist. It happened that the Department of the Aude, in Southern France, was to have a by-election the following autumn. He betook himself thither. Under the French code, a Deputy need not reside in the district he represents, but must be a property-owner. He bought a patch of land, by no means a domicile, in Narbonne, the department's liveliest town,¹ and presented himself to the voters. He was elected in November, and thereby instituted a double paradox. M. Blum is in principle a teetotaller,² though he has been known to sip a glass of wine with luncheon or dinner. The Department of the Aude is occupied almost exclusively with viticulture, and Narbonne is famous for its brandies.

¹ Its capital, however, is Carcassonne.

² "Blum is passionate on the subject of alcohol and sugar."—Jules Renard, *Journal inédit*, November 5, 1902.

Moreover, Socialism is an urban and industrial product, while the Aude is prevailingly agrarian. To be sure, Narbonne has manufactures of honey, salt, tiles, pottery, flour and saltpetre ; it boasts also a radical history ascending to the Revolution.¹ Whatever the cause, that remote province has continued its guest in office, through three elections, for more than eight years. On returning to the Chamber, he was the recipient of a compliment that is yet remembered. Raymond Poincaré was delivering a speech. His reoccupation of the Ruhr had been contested with fang and claw by Léon Blum, who was largely responsible for the overthrow of Poincaré's former ministry in June, 1924. Now he was again Premier. The nationalist chief broke off in the midst of his address, hastened to M. Blum's side and welcomed the new Deputy from the Aude with a clasp of the hand. Across every imaginable gulf of temperament and conviction, one upright man took pleasure in publicly greeting another.

In due course, the title of Leader of the Opposition was awarded to M. Blum by the Lower House. Steadfastly he refused office ; but it was understood that against his hostility no Cabinet could long survive. In order that government might continue to function, he invented an expedient called *préjugé favorable*, or "benevolent presumption." Through this device he was able, in return for support of his party measures, to screen the Ministry in power with

¹ In ancient times an important Roman seaport, Narbonne lies on a dusty plain six miles from the Mediterranean. Its population is 25,000.

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an indulgent, though unofficial, neutrality. It was, at bottom, an informal alliance between the two great parties of the Left, the Radical-Socialists and the Socialists. The system bade fair to operate for years. But suddenly, as twice before had happened, his fortunes swerved into a new path under the stroke of three events that dropped from the clouds. A chance meeting with Lucien Herr, the conversion of Jaurès and the Dreyfus case had plunged him, forty years earlier, into militant Socialism. The war, Jaurès' death and the bankruptcy of the Second International, in 1916, drove him to forsake literature for politics. Now he was to be swept into the mastery of France by the Stavisky scandal, a revolution of policy at Moscow and the rioting of Fascists in the Place de la Concorde.

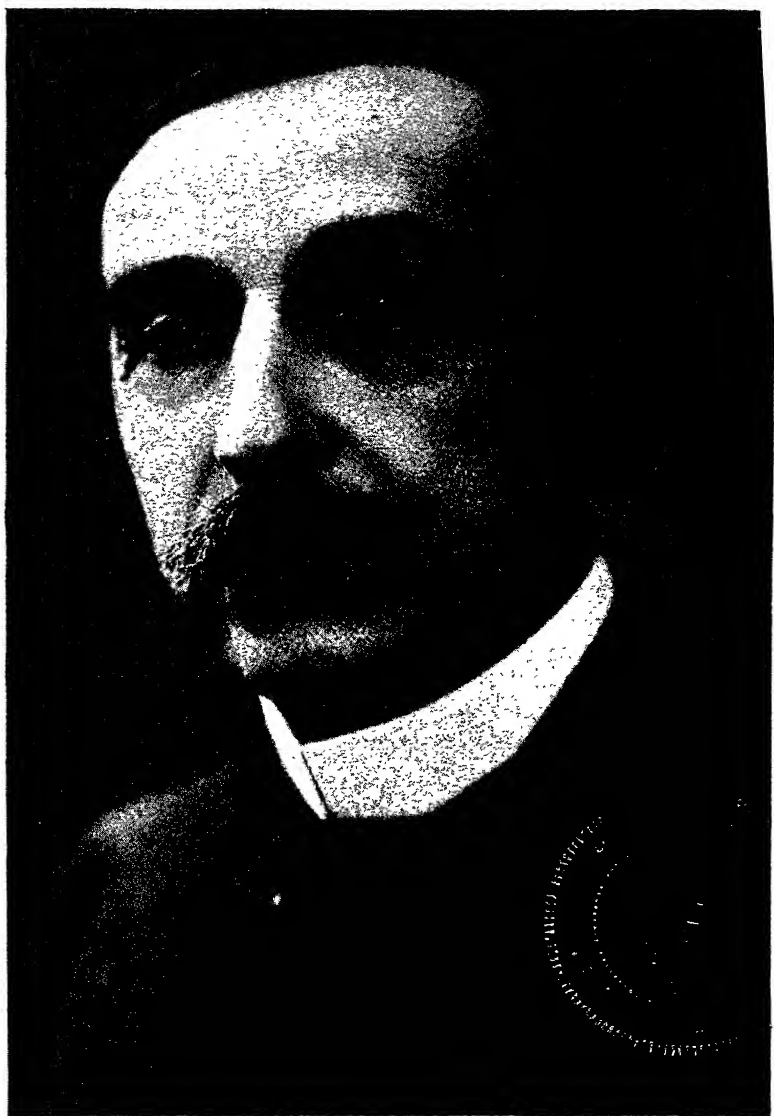
CHAPTER X

THE "POPULAR FRONT"

WHEN Lucien Herr's *petit bleu* dragged down the Ministry of Charles Dupuy on June 12, 1899, another Republican, Pierre-Ernest Waldeck-Rousseau, formed a *bloc* Cabinet, which included Alexandre Millerand, a Socialist, and two Radical-Socialists, Lanessan and Baudin. It was the beginning of the end for that superb party which founded the Third Republic, governed France twenty-seven years, mouldered from liberal to conservative and perished of the Dreyfus Affair. On June 7, 1902, Émile Combes took office as the first Radical-Socialist Premier. From that date till June 4, 1936, the country was ruled, generally speaking, by the Radical-Socialists—or Radicals, for short. Despite the ferocity of the name, they are neither Radical nor Socialist, but represent what is commonly described as the nation's backbone—the peasant freeholder, the small shopkeeper, the minor industrialist. Their motto has been: "Neither reaction nor revolution." Georges Clemenceau was their most eminent statesman. Though hostile to large-scale capital, they are exponents of rugged individualism and private ownership of wealth. Anyone doubtful on that point should have accompanied the writer to the Place de la Nation on the afternoon of July 14, 1936, when Édouard Daladier flung his capitalist creed in the face of 100,000 Communists and Socialists, his allies. But Clemenceau's party, like the Republicans, had been

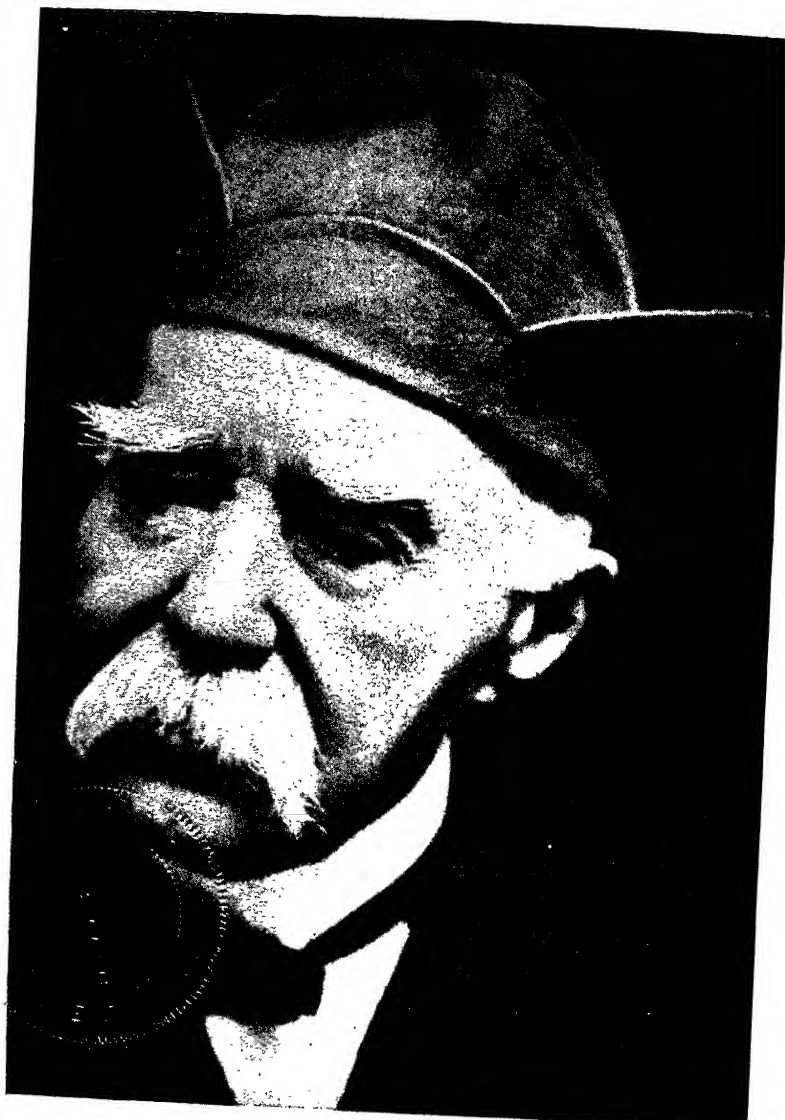
enervated by rule overlong. The prestige of the Radicals was injured by a foreign policy at once pacifist and feeble, and a domestic programme consisting of alternate bounds to Left and Right. They were members equally vociferous of the *Cartel des gauches*, or Leftist entente, which defeated Poincaré in 1924; and of the same Poincaré's government of National Union in 1926. These rapid reversals were not altogether unprincipled; they rose in part from a basic contradiction of doctrine. A good Radical is obliged, for example, to profess both the sanctity of private property and the abolition of the investment-living caste. Like the Republicans again, the party had forfeited nearly every trace of "idealistic vitality and public confidence." The sole pulse of animation in not a few of its leaders was a desperate resolve, at any price, to remain in office.

On January 4, 1934, a cloud appeared in the remote southern sky, near the Spanish border. It was no bigger than a man's hand, but was to swell within a month to the Dreyfus case, the fatality, of the Radical-Socialist Party. Brief items in the Paris newspapers disclosed that a judicial inquiry was in process into the accounts of the municipal pawn-broking establishment at Bayonne, and that the *Sûreté Générale* was searching for a man named Alexandre Stavisky, who for three years had managed the concern's affairs. It grew evident that a gigantic swindle had been practised, embracing a total put as high as £4,000,000. Two methods of fraud were employed. Genuine valuables



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MAURICE BARRÈS OF THE ACADEMIE FRANÇAISE
(1862-1922)



GEORGES CLEMENCEAU
(1841-1929)

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deposited as pledges for loans were replaced with worthless imitations. In issuing bonds of the establishment, entries of small sums, from 100 to 1000 francs, were written on the counterfoils, while the bonds themselves were made out in units of 500,000 and 1,000,000 francs. The difference was pocketed by the operators. These bonds were taken up all over the country, principally by insurance companies. The obligations of municipal pawnbroking enterprises are regarded in France as gilt-edged securities. What appeared at first a sordid commercial transgression expanded almost at once into a political crisis, involving the government of France itself. The insurance companies affirmed that their investments had been made under encouragement from the Ministry of Labour. They produced two letters, specifically recommending Bayonne pawnbroking bonds, which had been written in 1932. On the night of January 8 Stavisky died from a bullet through the head, in a villa at Chamonix where he lay hiding. The official report was that the fugitive killed himself as police surrounded the château. His widow and the opposition cried out that the gendarmes murdered Stavisky to forestall the exposures of accomplices in high places. The swindler's record was made known. Under half a dozen *aliases*, since 1912, he had repeatedly been apprehended for sharp practice, but was never brought to trial. One arrest occurred in July, 1926. It was revealed that this case had been nineteen times postponed, while the defendant, out on bail, happily continued his larcenies. The

indictment was still pending ; the next arraignment was docketed for January 26, 1934. The downfall of two of its officers wrecked the Cabinet of Camille Chautemps, which resigned January 27. Astute Radicals saw that a gulf had opened at their feet, and began looking about for rescue, from whatever source.

If the party of Chautemps and Daladier required a friendly grip to save it from falling, the French Communists were in urgent need of a hand up. With good reason, they were profoundly demoralized. At Tours, in 1920, they commanded an overwhelming majority of the nation's proletarian representatives. What had they to show for nearly fifteen years of incessant propaganda and demonstration ? Exactly ten members in the Chamber of Deputies. But Léon Blum had noted, some years earlier, that while the façade, language and personnel of Bolshevism remained unaltered, its ideological content was drastically changing. To deny that phenomenon, he added, would be equivalent to the error of a stranger who might have fancied, near the close of the Directory, that the Revolution was still in progress.¹ As a matter of fact, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had been surreptitiously making off, one by one, with the policies of the Second International. The elder organization had been denounced as patriotic, opportunist and liberal ; the Russian government became genuinely the first two at least orally the third. Terrified by the menace on either hand of

¹ Léon Blum, *Bolchevisme et socialisme*.

Germany and Japan, the proponents of violence conceded that much was to be said—outside Russia, of course—for the method of legislative reform. The Tartar strategists had excited and waged popular civil war ; now their hearts yearned for the brotherhood, the unity, of all mass bodies. They had harried the Second International without mercy, and prosecuted as well as taught a campaign of extermination against the lesser middle-class. Rather than endure the slightest petty-bourgeois taint, they had chosen to lose France. Suddenly they proposed an alliance—but not in Russia—of Communists, Socialists and small capitalists, with the purpose of launching a parliamentary offensive against Fascism. For this projected *entente* was coined the name of "Popular Front." To cover its startling right-about-face, the Third International proclaimed that the *Front populaire* was a brand-new device, an unprecedented tactic, which had been invented by the genius of Communism. At that pretension M. Blum could afford to smile. A fusion of all plebeian elements had been from the outset a desideratum of French Socialism. The "Unified Party" of Jaurès in 1905 was a compromise between Marxists and reformists. M. Blum himself had acted in open alliance, from June, 1924, to April, 1925, with the Radical Ministry of Édouard Herriot. He was one of the chief architects, in 1924, of a Leftist coalition of Socialists and Radicals. What was this *Cartel des gauches*, what was his own contrivance of the *Préjugé favorable*, but a species of dress-rehearsal for

a *Rassemblement populaire* ? Nevertheless, he turned to the Slavic overture a hospitable ear. Co-operation with the minor bourgeoisie he had long practised. As for the Communists, sorrow as well as anger had always penetrated his diatribes ; he rarely failed to sound a note of almost papal solicitude for the return of these heretics, these economic Lutherans, to the true fold, *La vieille maison*.

Thus, at the end of January, 1934, all the components of a French Popular Front stood ready ; for their crystallization a mere jostle was needed. That impulse was supplied only a week later by a redoubtable insurrection of Fascists which exploded in Paris on the night of February 6. Thousands of armed rioters assembled in the Place de la Concorde with the resolution of storming the Chamber of Deputies. These were no irresponsible lads, such as the Camelots du Roy ; they were men serious and determined, of middle age, veterans of the World War and members of an ex-service organization of the Right known as the Croix de Feu. They put the Ministry of Marine to the torch and battled with the Garde Mobile during several hours, charge for charge and volley for volley. How many were killed has never been accurately ascertained ; more than a thousand were wounded. The uprising was mastered, but the chiefs of the commonalty were sorely alarmed. They had felt the gust of a Fascist *coup d'état*. At one moment the insurgents pressed three-fourths of the way across the Pont de la Concorde ; they were within an ace

of smashing the last screen of militia that defended the Palais Bourbon.

The parties of the Left were thrust into alliance by a common dismay. About them rallied the Socialist and Communist labour unions, the League for the Rights of Man, the Socialist and Republican Union, the Vigilance Committee of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals, the Group for Militant Action and the World Commission Against Fascism and War. Though the confederates were broadly in harmony as to purpose, the opening moves of the Popular Front's establishment were complex and tedious. First there were old jealousies to placate, inveterate suspicions to mollify, ancient feuds to compose. Radicals and Communists were vowed, in more than theory, to reciprocal destruction. The quest of a programme satisfactory to all excited jars involving not only method but passionate principle. It was agreed, for example, that the relations between the Bank of France and the government should be altered. The Marxists proposed that the institution be nationalized and its stockholders expropriated. The Radicals insisted that they remain in undisturbed ownership of shares and dividends. M. Blum and his lieutenants acted as intercessors in such collisions; their part was to search out a feasible compromise. Only as a result of prolonged negotiation was a "minimum platform" adopted. Its important planks demanded a reduction of the labour week to forty hours, the right of collective bargaining, vacations for workers with pay, a scheme of public building to remedy

unemployment, measures to allay the farm crisis, extension of school age to fourteen years, amnesty for political offenders, repression of slander and extortion in journalism, equality of all political groups before the microphone, abolition of the *décrets-lois* under which legislative powers had been usurped by the Executive, dissolution of all Fascist leagues, reform of the statutes governing the Bank of France and nationalization of the munitions industry. The electoral programme was fortunately more simple. Because of the multitude of parties in France, two elections instead of one are commonly required to choose a Deputy. The candidates winning the largest number of ballots at the first poll are matched against each other in a run-off election that follows a week afterwards. It was understood that Radicals, Socialists and Communists might put forward separate candidates in the first election, but must pool their votes in the second on behalf of that representative of either party who emerged as victor in the primary. Ultimately, on Bastille Day, July 14, 1925, Léon Blum, president of the French Socialist Party; Édouard Daladier, leader of the Radicals; and Marcel Cachin, belligerent Marxist commander, paraded arm in arm at the head of a vast proletarian concourse that wound through the East Side of Paris. Thus, for all men to see, was dramatized the birth of *Le Front populaire*.

The coalition plunged into a vehement campaign for the elections of April 26 and May 3, 1936. Their outcome may have been influenced by an

episode that befell some weeks earlier. At lunch time, on February 13, M. Blum, leaving the Chamber, joined M. Monnet, also a Deputy, and Mme Monnet in their automobile. Driving along the Boulevard Saint-Germain, they encountered a detachment of Camelots du Roy, who had assembled for the funeral of Jacques Bainville, a Royalist apostle. The Socialist chieftain was recognized. Angered by what they regarded as the blasphemous intrusion of an Israelite, scores of young men surrounded the vehicle, smashed the windows, dragged out its occupants and belaboured them with cuffs and kicks. One mourner wrenched off a tail-light and struck M. Blum with it behind the ear, severing an artery. If rescue and surgical care had not been prompt, he would perhaps have bled to death. The future Prime Minister's scarf and hat were carried off by the Camelots as trophies for their "museum." According to the version of *l'Action Française*, Léon Blum, "this roadhog whom not even respect for death can restrain," tried to force his "magnificent motor car" across the funeral procession, while shouting in a stentorian voice: "Who are these cads?" He was properly chastised, the account maintained, for his sacrilegious impertinence. It happened that an amateur photographer was making a cinema reel of the gathering. His films showed that the assault took place twenty minutes before the arrival of the *cortège*, and that the "magnificent motor car" was an ancient four-cylinder Citroën. There were storms in the Chamber, arrests and

trials. A marked difference in public attitude respecting Léon Blum now came to pass. Hitherto he had generally been looked upon as a cold and somewhat inhuman intellectual apparatus. His picture, with a halo of bandages, was freely circulated. On a sudden, for the first time, he became a popular and sympathetic figure.

The Leftist *entente* won at the polls by a decisive majority—which was a foregone conclusion. It was the specific character of the victory that confounded every prophet. Universal expectation had been that the Radicals would retain their customary majority, and assume leadership and responsibility in carrying out the Popular Front programme. As happens occasionally in French politics, the generals reached the trenches only to learn that the privates had already occupied the enemy position. Apparently the voters had not forgotten *l’Affaire Stavisky*. The Radicals lost 51 seats ; with a representation of 108 instead of 159, they dropped from first to second position in the Chamber. Thanks in part to the run-off election system, the Communists bounded from 10 seats to 72.¹ The Socialists gained 47 ; their 148 Deputies were at last the dominant group of Parliament. As leader of that *bloc*, M. Blum discovered to his stupefaction that he was indicated as the next Premier of the Republic. In the cause of Socialism tens of thousands of Frenchmen had suffered

¹ There was also a group of ten Dissenting Communists, led by Jacques Doriot, Mayor of Saint-Denis. They had revolted from Moscow and been expelled from the Third International.

captivity, banishment and death. Time's caprice enjoined that the heir of their martyrdom should be a sonneteer, an exquisite, who had let the faith shift for itself while he indulged in the worldliness of reviewing shows. Not for the saints but the prodigal had destiny reserved its prize. By reaching out a hand, Léon Blum could grasp the suzerainty of France. Yet, during a month, he paused undecided. There was gossip even of hysteria, and fits of sobbing.

In the last few years he must have grown aware that, if he lived, he would some day be Prime Minister. But his scheme of 1918 envisaged a uniform majority of Socialists, bound to their leader by tested loyalty and a common evangel. He found himself instead the ruler of an alliance so centrifugal that its elements would dart asunder in a fortnight unless held together by a hand at once firm and adept in the arts of conciliation. He would be obliged in honour to function as the head not of a Socialist but a coalition government. The straightforward, coherent policies of his dream must give place to compromise, manoeuvre and the adjournment of his profoundest convictions. Sworn to the destruction of the capitalist order, he would preside over a following one-third of whom were capitalists. An ardent collectivist, he would be forced to consult the views of a squad of determined individualists. He would have constantly, as a man of law and peace, to withstand the struggles of his Marxist affiliates to coerce him into paths of violence. More than once the distracted statesman

put to himself the question : " What would Jean Jaurès wish that I, such as I am, should do ? "

To that query only one answer was possible. There was an immediate duty to perform. Exact pledges had been made to the country ; these must be fulfilled. As M. Blum pondered further, he began to take heart. He could rely through thick and thin on his 148 Socialists. To be sure, he might be overthrown in an instant by the desertion of either of his confederates. But was not their need of him still more imperative ? Through alliance with the Communists, the Radicals had burned the last bridge connecting them with the other capitalist denominations. At that moment a distinguished organ of the Right was pronouncing that " history will tell of the grand treason of the Radical-Socialist Party and the baleful error of its leaders."¹ The Radicals had joined the coalition principally as an electoral stratagem ; they were punished by finding themselves as truly captive to Socialism as Jeffersonian Democracy, in America, was becoming prisoner to the New Deal. The Communists could be depended on to play every trick in their power. Already, in concert with the labour unions, they had refused M. Blum's urgent entreaties to participate in a Popular Front Cabinet.² They preferred to retain their traditional freedom of action. This meant, he understood thoroughly, licence to sabot-

¹ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, May 15, 1936.

² However, Léon Jouhaux, secretary-general and spokesman of the C.G.T., accepted with alacrity an appointment as director of the reconstituted Bank of France.

age at pleasure the government they had helped to install. But, in the last analysis, the Marxists could not vote him out of office without committing suicide. For all their 72 Deputies, they would be impotent if divided from the Socialists. And Moscow, from whence their orders came, would certainly give tongue if its French alliance were endangered. No one had spoken and printed harsher words than Léon Blum about Communists and Radicals both. Nevertheless, he could probably bring either to heel by a mere threat of resigning. For who would take his place? He was the only leader of commanding stature in his own party. Would it be Senator Cachin, the Communist, or M. Daladier, the Radical? Simply to utter their names proved the absurdity of the thought. Which of them could hold the league in existence twenty-four hours? Finally—though he would be too modest to fancy so—M. Blum's most powerful assets were his individual qualities. He had no competitor among his fellow statesmen for subtle, rapid and far-sighted intelligence. No other approached him in renown for absolute good faith and entire lack of personal ambition. If he had tarried too long beside the Rubicon, there was no hesitation once he determined to cross. On the evening of June 4, 1936, he appeared at the Elysée Palace and accepted from President Lebrun a mandate to form a government. His age was sixty-four years and two months.

By a coincidence which it would be unpardonable to overlook, Benjamin Disraeli was in his sixty-

fourth year when in February, 1868, he became for the first time Premier of Great Britain. The contrast is arresting between the two Jews who made themselves masters of Christian nations. The Frenchman betrays no sign of "Dizzy's" Levantine gaudiness of apparel and discourse. The latter mounted from the trading class to an Earldom; the former descended from the capitalist caste to serve the poor. The one was devoted to the monarchistic idea; the other has consecrated his life to the cause of the multitude. Disraeli flattered an Empress; Léon Blum reasons with a democracy. Baptized as a child, the first argued that Christianity is the logical terminus of Judaism; the second, equally emancipated from the Talmud, condemns the Nazaritic faith as a device for keeping the proletariat in thralldom. Lord Beaconsfield was a statesman who amused his leisure by composing fiction; M. Blum is a professional man of letters who trampled down the more congenial half of his personality and drove himself, at the dictate of a merciless conscience, to become a politician. They are alike, however, in virtuosity with facts and figures, genius for authorship as well as statecraft and devout pride of race.

CHAPTER XI

LE NEW DEAL



THE prestige of democratic institutions has rarely been at lower ebb than at the beginning of 1936. Even in America and England there ascended voices of admiration for the prompt, massive efficiency of the German and Italian despotisms. The classic example of republican incompetence had been supplied for years by the French Parliament. Throughout the country and Europe its authority was bankrupt. Of all places on earth, the lobbies of Senate and Chamber echoed most frequently with the cry of despair : " This cannot go on ! " The government resembled an aeroplane which a series of pilots drove thrashing along the ground, but which they were unable to heave into the air. The nation was ready to turn aloof in disgust, assured that the apparatus could not fly. M. Blum had long ago contended that the aviators, not the machine, were at fault. Against a common impression that the average French legislator is either a clown or a knave, he protested in 1918—and allowed the assertion to stand when his book was reprinted in 1936—that as a whole the Deputies and Senators are men of public spirit, zeal and integrity. " Most of them," he declared, " take their profession seriously or even solemnly, as a kind of sacrament ; to the task a majority dedicate their whole energies and their lives."¹ With the inauguration of *Le Front populaire* came the hazardous privilege of testing his doctrines in

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale* (p. 155).

action. To the surprise of all, the earthbound hulk sprang aloft and wheeled powerfully, steadily and swiftly on its course. No dictatorship could have functioned with more certainty and dispatch. Yet every process was in meticulous accord with the purest democratic theory. A specific programme of legislation, freely espoused by a popular majority, had been put into force word for word by its chartered representatives, under a leader constitutionally appointed and no other mandate than the electoral will. For that accomplishment alone the first ten weeks of Léon Blum's ministry should be entitled to a salaam from posterity. Trust in popular government revived in France, and liberalism all over the world took heart. It may yet be recorded that the democratic idea, having touched nadir, began its re-ascent in Paris between June 6 and August 14, 1936.

On the former date the new President of the Council of Ministers made his bow to the Chamber ; on the latter, he adjourned Parliament. During this concise period was achieved the most impressive body of social reparations that the Third Republic has witnessed. If it fell short of the proletarian revolution of the Premier's ideal, it was a powerful advance in that direction, and was accomplished without one act of force, by the exclusive instruments of reason and persuasion. The technique of sovereignty elaborated by Léon Blum the doctrinaire, before he had so much as entered the Chamber, performed in practice like clockwork. On other issues, we shall learn, his majority came

near flying apart. But it was a unit in support of the Popular Front's election platform. Within that domain it operated as the loyal, homogeneous party of his system, organized by the government in advance of taking power. There had been fears that the Senate, traditional organ of big business, might revolt. Eighteen years earlier M. Blum foresaw that the Upper House would never dare withstand a resolute alliance of Chamber and Ministry.¹ Exactly so it resulted. The Senate adopted the 40-hour week by a majority of 182 to 84, and collective bargaining by 279 to 8. "I think no," was the humiliating confession of Senator Caillaux, "but I vote yes." From the Prime Minister's ready staff of legal and financial experts flooded volumes of ordinances and reports, including a masterly analysis of the Bank of France. The administrative specialists, his Cabinet officers, swung with the confidence of preparation into the management of their departments; each undertook to guide through Parliament such measures as related to his portfolio. On occasions of emergency only did M. Blum appear before the legislative branch. He had avoided an error for which his theory upbraided Clemenceau, Ribot and Briand—that of burdening their shoulders with a second department, such as Foreign Affairs or War, in addition to the *Présidence du Conseil*. Like his father and the chiefs of great trusts whom he had examined attentively in his rôle of corporation counsel, he did not strive to manage every detail,

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale* (p. 168).

but reserved himself for the functions of co-ordination, oversight, general policy and major decision.

His programme of reforms was commonly nicknamed *Le new deal*; his methods, not always in panegyric, acquired the label *de faire rooseveltisme*. A catalogue of these enactments will presently be summarized in his own words. American readers may be interested, meanwhile, in some account of the national diversities of temper and law which enabled Léon Blum to perfect his enterprise not only with expedition but finality, whereas Franklin D. Roosevelt was balked in some of his most cherished adventures. It must be acknowledged at once that the Prime Minister was open to no charge of legerdemain such as sprang from the President's exploit of causing the Democratic platform of 1932 to vanish, and materializing in its stead the chief planks of the Socialist Party. The French electorate was apprised in advance, with exact detail, of what would happen if it voted the Popular Front into power. The Parisian likes men about him that are mature. He is on record as vowing that the appetite of young men for public office must be curbed. "To govern is to act," his formula runs, "and in youth action tends to be imperfect."¹ The President's most striking advantage was his assurance of a four-year term. The Premier could be dashed out of office in four minutes, if it were thus resolved by a majority one half of whom, Radicals and Communists, were in principle his enemies.

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale* (p. 129.)

The odds otherwise were in the Socialist's favour. That the concepts of freedom and equality are mutually destructive has been pointed out by logicians. The proletariat of Great Britain is divided from the ruling caste by what amounts to a wall of race ; distinctions of character and physique are fortified by those of language, manners and dress. Therefore the Commons abjure all pretension to equality, but have made a dogged stand for personal liberty. The yokel who touches his forelock to a peer would resist furiously the same nobleman's intrusion upon the " castle " of his hut. No visitor of France, on the other hand, remains unimpressed by the remarkable homogeneity of its population. University president and Communist taxi-driver exhibit not indeed the same quantity of intelligence, but something approaching the same quality. The observances and phraseology of politeness are identical from Boulevard Saint-Germain to Rue Victor Massé. The Frenchman's most passionate instinct is that of equality ; he tends, in comparison, to allow freedom to shift for itself. As a matter of course he accepts the idea of a powerfully centralized government, to which he has been inured by generations of absolute monarchy and empire. His Constitution provides little trace of that multiple system of balances through which the American charter, inspired by Anglo-Saxon dread of tyranny, sought to restrain the licence of the Executive. The French Premier, on the contrary, when supported by a majority in the Lower House, is all but omnipotent. The Departments

have never asserted, nor does the Constitution of 1875 acknowledge on their behalf, any of those autonomous attributes which are known in America as "States' Rights." The founders of the Third Republic declined to intrust the President with the veto ; he has no option but to promulgate and execute any law Parliament sees fit to adopt. The Senate was designed as a counterpoise to the Chamber. It is not, as in America, chosen by popular suffrage, but by electoral colleges in the respective Departments. It has always been considered the particular guardian of the great industrial and commercial interests of France, and of its foreign and colonial policies. By rejecting a Bill proposed by the Chamber, or even neglecting to act upon it, the Senate may exercise a power equivalent to nullification by the Supreme Court in America, and superior to the President's veto, which a two-thirds majority can override. Abolition of the Upper House, for this reason, has long been a project of the Radical parties. But that haughty assemblage, as we have just observed, may be relied on to capitulate to any prevalent popular movement.

Secure against interference by Departments, President or Senate, M. Blum enjoyed another advantage worth the rest put together : *Le new deal* was not subject to judicial review. Though no article of the Constitution forbids its doing so, the Conseil d'État not only declines to pass on legislative policy, but has uniformly dismissed all suits demanding that it arrogate this function. To be sure, a citizen prosecuted by the government at its tribunal

may respond either that he is innocent or that the law under which he stands arraigned is technically unconstitutional. The court may agree that the statute is faulty, and discharge the defendant on that ground. But its judgment refers only to the process at issue. In France, the Supreme Court's verdict in the *Schechter* case would have affected the poultry enterprise alone, and could not have resulted in the universal downfall of the National Industrial Recovery Act.¹ It was therefore with a freedom of action virtually unbridled that the Leftist entente assumed power. The situation was perfectly calculated—and Mr. Roosevelt now and then may have envied it—for rushing through and securing a programme such as that of the Popular Front. But authority thus absolute has one drawback of the gravest character. A minority like the French Fascists, considering itself oppressed, not illogically concludes that it has no resource but armed rebellion. To such counsels of despair may be attributed the riots which chronically beset Paris ; and also the circumstance that, on any evening last summer, a stroller along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées had merely to glance up the side-streets to

¹ There is, however, a species of legislation which the Conseil d'État not only can, but frequently does, abrogate on the ground of unconstitutionality. In the interest of efficiency and dispatch, there grew up a system of lawmaking by ministerial decree. In resistance to such edicts, known as *décrets-lois*, the citizen may resort to a process defined as "Recourse against excessive power," under which the Conseil d'État has authority not merely to relieve the claimant but to abolish the offending measure altogether.

behold troop after troop of militia lurking in their recesses. It is informative to discover that M. Blum has always refused to entertain the notion of destroying the Senate; and that he not only esteems the American system of a judiciary independent of Congress and President, but complains that the French courts, as he puts it, are simply "an administration and not a power."¹

General feeling as to the breadth of the government's responsibilities was more advanced than that of 1932 in America. "You will believe me," the Prime Minister has declared. "when I say that I am a good democrat."² To the French mind, which recoils from no logical extreme, the sense of the word "democracy" would be imperfect if its scope were restricted to political and civil rights, such as freedom of ballot, speech and assembly. There is also a huge economic area; and starvation is considered an issue at least as important as exclusion from suffrage. No journal, however malcontent, raised a question as to the power and obligation of the Popular Front Cabinet to occupy itself with the citizen's means for earning a living. Had the Premier been forced by some invincible impediment to amend the Constitution, he would have found that the undertaking possesses a facility which President Roosevelt might indeed covet. All that is required is a majority vote in Chamber and Senate respectively, and then a majority vote of the membership of both houses, sitting jointly in what is known as the National Assembly. This

¹ *La Réforme gouvernementale* (p. 231).

² *Idem.* (p. 27).

enterprise may be accomplished in theory between dawn and dusk of the same day. The catch is that a session of the National Assembly, to be lawful, must be held at Versailles ; the process of amending the Constitution is described in political slang as "going to Versailles." The Frenchman, notoriously static, detests travel. Horror of that train-trip of two hours may be in part responsible for the fact that only thrice in sixty-one years has the Parliament "gone to Versailles."¹

It was consequently without reservations of any sort that the Prime Minister, proroguing Parliament on the morning of August 14, announced that the Popular Front's engagements had been fulfilled. In solemn pride he recalled that on June 6 the government undertook to submit to the Chamber certain drafts of law, with a request that they be enacted prior to its adjournment. He continued : "The project concerning political amnesty—a broad law of amnesty was voted ; the week of forty hours—that was voted ; collective contracts—they were voted ; a plan of great public works—a plan of public works was voted ; nationalization of munitions—that was voted ; a Wheat Office—it is about to be voted ; extension of school age—that was voted ; reform of the statutes of the Bank of France, to guarantee a preponderance of national

¹ The more important amendments forbid any member of a dynasty that has reigned in France to become President, and enjoin that the republican form of government shall never be made the subject of constitutional amendment. Both could be repealed by the same method through which they were adopted.

interests in its direction—this reform was voted ; preliminary revision of the *décrets-lois*—that was voted. Every pledge has been performed. And we have not been satisfied merely with keeping our promises. The Chamber has voted in addition a law repressing financial fraud and the flight of capital ; a law granting assistance to industry, commerce and artisanry ; a law reorganizing insurance credits and stabilizing the coal market ; a text against illicit increases of price, another on the superannuation of miners, a third lowering the age limit of functionaries and a fourth regulating the debts of tradesmen and farmers. In ten weeks we have accomplished a work of which I do not believe the history of our country offers many examples.”¹

The legislative campaign thus triumphantly crowned was notable for the diversity of its expeditions ; it was governed, however, by a central strategic thought—that of establishing in French jurisprudence the superiority of human to property rights. As the glory of Marengo swallowed up a throng of operations of which it was the climax, so, for dramatic and historical interest, one among the numerous conquests of the Popular Front overshadows the rest. In the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, near the Palais-Royal, stands a building which is only four stories high but which occupies a square block, the French conception of grandeur being horizontal rather than vertical. It has a spacious courtyard roofed with glass, and formerly boasted a reception hall of blinding munificence,

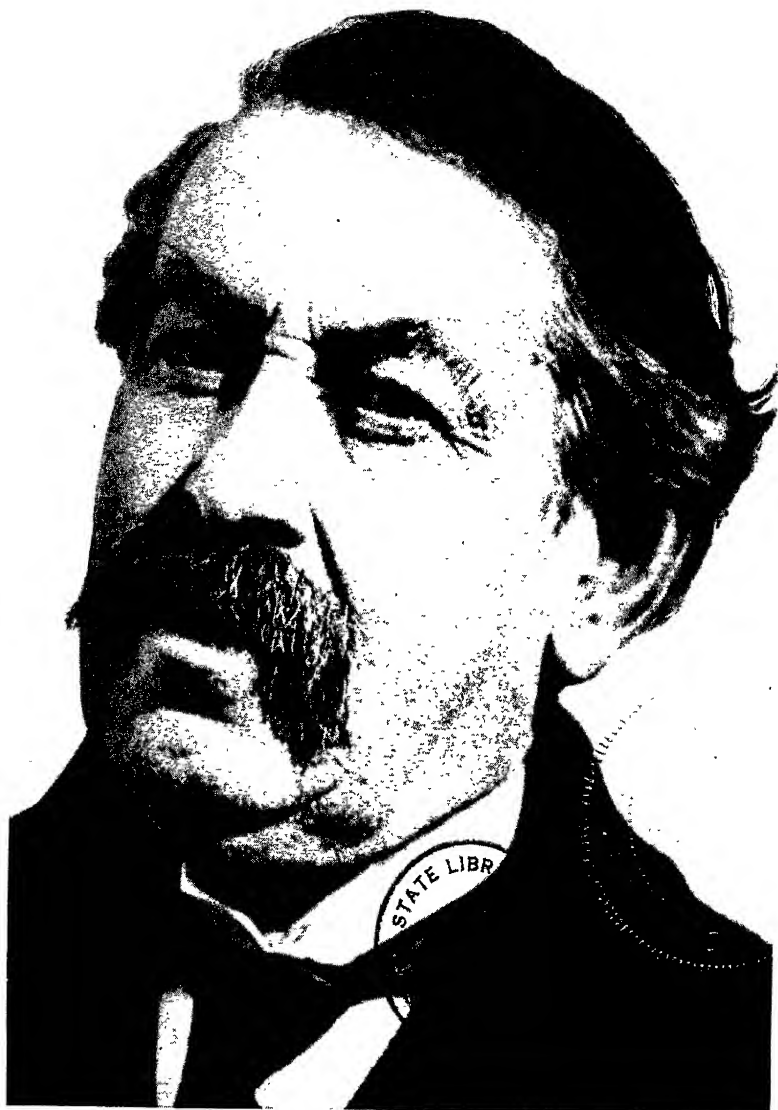
¹ Quoted by the Paris *Temps* of August 15, 1936.

La Galerie dorée, the Golden Gallery. It houses an institution which for a century and a third directed with autocratic sway the whole economy of France ; but its structure embodied a survival so prehistoric as to arouse a sense of the monstrous—as if, across the parade of motor cars in the Boulevard de la Madeleine, there should galumph a megatherium. Over the principal entrance is carved, in stone, the brief and superb legend, *Banque de France*.

It was one of the four or five world-citadels of the capitalist régime. In its vaults lie the nation's reserves of gold, amounting to 54 billion francs. It prints and guarantees every bank-note in circulation throughout the country—though not in the French colonies—a total of 80 billions of francs. Its annual operations involve 155 billions. There are 18 branches in Paris and its environs, 159 regional banks in the various provinces, 87 agencies and 400 bureaux of deposit in as many towns. For the entire Republic it determines both cost and amount of credit. By controlling the rate at which bills are discounted, it fixes the expense of credit to the money market, business and banking in general. By managing the volume of advances and discounts, it regulates the amount of credit available. The Bank of France performs not only the usual functions of a central bank but also those of a commercial bank, the largest in the country. It is in immediate contact, on a vast scale, with industry and commerce. Its fiat altering the discount rate are directly and instantly effective. Its influence on credit is more powerful than that of the Federal

Reserve System or the Bank of England, the former of which deals exclusively and the latter chiefly with other banks. With interests of such magnitude, the institution centred its activities upon projects of high finance, in the field of large industry. It was accused of turning a deaf ear to the needs not merely of agriculture and labour but of small business. The Bank of France might as well not have existed, a speaker in the Chamber declared, so far as nine-tenths of the Republic's business men were concerned.

This stronghold was often dubbed "the second Bastille." For 136 years it repelled every assault. It outlived two republics, two empires and two royal dynasties. It survived Waterloo, the revolution of 1848, Sedan, the Paris Commune and the World War. And then, on the night of July 16, 1936, it fell—but not to the blaze of musketry and the shrieks of human slaughter. There were six hours of debate in the Chamber, and a tranquil vote. The walls of the fortress burst apart under the shock of a mere phrase, the invention of the Radical-Socialist leader Édouard Daladier. "In this country of individualistic democracy," he exclaimed, "two hundred families have become the undisputed masters not only of French finance but French politics." Lured by a numerical coincidence that was partly fortuitous, general opinion identified the *Deux cents familles* with the two hundred largest stockholders of the Bank of France, who had nominally controlled its destinies, under statute, since the consulship of Napoleon. A



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considerable number, it is true, were fiduciary and even philanthropic corporations. But the onslaught of the battle-cry was so deadly that the government's reform Bill passed Chamber and Senate by more than its usual majorities.

Unlike party slogans in general, M. Daladier's erred on the side of understatement. With literal justice, it might have been narrowed from two hundred families to twelve. For *Les deux cents actionnaires*, the chief stockholders of the Bank of France, had long ago been stripped of all voice in its management. They assembled only once a year, when they were privileged to listen, mute and powerless, to the annual reports ; these they were not suffered to criticize, discuss or so much as approve. They adopted without argument such slates of nominees as were handed down from above. The total powers of the bank, and in consequence its sovereignty as to national finance, had fallen to twelve great capitalists who composed a majority of its Conseil de Régence, or Board of Directors, and who were chosen almost exclusively in accordance with the dynastic principle.¹ After the

¹ Napoleon was responsible for introducing that principle into the Bank of France. Desiring to found an aristocracy of the Empire and equip it in perpetuity with the wherewithal most needed in a material epoch, he ordained that among the nobility holdings of Bank of France stock should be permanent trusts, attached to the title and passing with it inalienably from father to son. This is why, in the list of the *Deux cents actionnaires*, there was so disproportionate a number of Dukes, Marquises, Counts and Barons, and so striking a roster of titled names dating from Imperial and even Royal France, such as Contades, Albufera, Remusat, Reinach, Ribes, etc.

yearly meeting of January, 1936, this group comprised six bankers, Ernest Mallet, Baron Jean-Henri-Maurice Hottinguer, Baron Édouard-Alphonse-James de Rothschild, Baron Jacques-Germain Pourpart de Neufelize, Maurice-Alfred Tinardon and David David-Weil ; five industrialists, Paul-François-Aimé-Robert Darblay, René-Paul Duchemin, Pierre Mirabaud, Camille Poulenc and François-Augustin-Marie de Wendel ; and one representative of agriculture, the Marquis Louis de Vogüé. A report of the Chamber's Finance Committee declared that these magnates, in their own persons or through relatives, controlled in addition 95 of the largest corporations of France, including 31 private banks, 8 insurance companies, 9 railroads, 8 steamship lines, 8 mining corporations, 6 electrical companies and 12 chemical trusts. It was a curious fact that the directorate's pivotal influence was Protestant and by descent Swiss. Not a few of its members were scions of Genevan moneychangers who followed Jacques Necker to France in the eighteenth century.

"Heredity," observed the Finance Committee's report, "has become the principal means of arriving at the General Council of the Bank of France ; its management, and in particular its discount policy, are in the hands of an oligarchy who contrive to govern the entire economy of this country over the heads of its freely chosen representatives." The truth of that charge may be ascertained by a glance at the records. In the luxurious *salon* of the Board of Directors was an

oval table, about which were arranged fifteen arm-chairs, like minor thrones.¹ Each bore a number. The third seat was occupied without interruption for 136 years, from February 13, 1800, to July 16, 1936, by members of the private banking house of Mallet Frères et Cie., of Paris. The ancestral Mallet, a founder of the bank, served 27 years as Régent. On his death the chair passed to Baron James Mallet, who held it for 33 years. He was succeeded in 1860 by Baron Alphonse Mallet, who served 45 years. The last incumbent, Ernest Mallet, dean of the Board of Directors, became Régent in 1905. A banker named Hottinguer took possession of the tenth seat in 1803, held it 30 years and left it to his son, Henri Hottinguer, who served as Régent till 1849. There was an interregnum of 20 years, and then, in the fourth seat, appeared Roderique Hottinguer, now rejoicing in the title of Baron. He held it for the patriarchal term of 52 years. There was another interval of eight years; in 1929 there emerged as occupant of the seventh seat its most recent holder, Baron Henri Hottinguer. Baron Alphonse de Rothschild assumed the ninth chair in 1855 and held it for 51 years. His son, Baron Édouard de Rothschild, followed in 1905. Together they occupied the same seat for 81 years. William d'Eichthal, banker, who retired from the Regency some years

¹ The statutory membership of the Conseil des Régents was fifteen. In addition to the twelve capitalists there were three Treasury officials. The last incumbents of that species were Louis Blanc of Lille, Charles Prévost of Marseilles and Jean Veraguth of Versailles.

ago, held the seat occupied by his grandfather, Adolphe d'Eichthal, and his uncle, Paul Mirabaud. William d'Eichthal left it to his nephew, Pierre Mirabaud. The family of Casimir-Périer, President of France during 1894-1895, contributed to the bank four Régents, who sat continuously for 69 years. His great-grandfather, Claude Périer, a rich manufacturer from Grenoble, was among the founders and held his seat from 1800 to 1808. It passed in turn to three of his sons, Scipion, Casimir and Josèphe, the last of whom retained it for 37 years, until 1869. A financier named Vernes was a Deputy-Governor of the bank from 1832 to 1857; his grandson served as Régent from 1866 to 1907; and the latter's son, Félix Vernes, became a Director in 1921. J. B. Davillier, a banker, was elected Régent in 1801 and passed the chair to his son, Sanson Davillier. The latter held it from 1842 to 1864, and transmitted it in turn to his son, Henri Davillier, who sat as a Director from 1864 to 1883. After an interval appeared Baron Maurice Davillier, who served from 1905 to 1927.¹

By this time it should be evident that the prey which Léon Blum set himself to drag down was hardy and not ignoble. The life of the bank was coeval with that of modern France; it was founded in 1800 by no less a hand than Napoleon's. He was its first subscriber, taking thirty shares.² His

¹ These records have been compiled mostly from Gabriel Ramon's official *Histoire de la Banque de France*.

² His sister-in-law, the former Hortense de Beauharnais, purchased ten shares, Murat and Duroc five each, and Joseph Bonaparte one share.

autograph, *Bonaparte, pour trente actions*, is treasured in the bank's archives. In 1806, still under Napoleon's direction, a charter was granted which for 130 years, with minor amendments, determined its organic structure. The experiment of State banking had proved disastrous under the Revolution. Napoleon was therefore at pains to establish the private ownership of the Bank of France. From the beginning, however, it was intrusted with a privilege in the highest degree public. It was a bank of issue, with the function of printing money, at first for Paris alone but soon for all France. An effort was made, by setting up the following agencies, to strike a balance between the interests of the country and those of the investors of capital : a Governor and two Deputy-Governors, appointed by the State ; a General Assembly, consisting of the two hundred largest stockholders ; three Censeurs, or Auditors, elected by the General Assembly, whose unanimous disapproval of any undertaking sufficed to cancel it ; the Conseil des Régents, three of whom were appointed by the Treasury, while twelve were elected by the General Assembly ; and finally a General Council of twenty-one members, including the Governor and Deputy-Governors, the Censeurs and the fifteen Directors. As the Auditors had no votes, it will be seen that at sessions of the General Council the agents of the Government, totalling six, could be out-voted two to one by the representatives of capital, numbering twelve. As a check against the latter, it was decreed that the term of Director should be limited

to five years, and that the Governor's signature should be essential to every contract and engagement ; by withholding it, he could interpose a veto on any transaction suggested.

How "The Twelve" proceeded to blast away every obstacle to their absolute power is an instructive study in the evolution of an oligarchy. At the first possible moment, they obtained the passage of a statute making the Régents eligible to re-election. With this opening, they began to convert the directorships into life tenures and then into family heirlooms handed down intact from father to son or from uncle to nephew. The General Assembly was reduced by progressive steps to complete nullity. The custom arose of choosing the Auditors from among the Régents, the "Two Hundred Families" or certainly the capitalistic caste. It was made a law that the Governor must own 100 shares of stock, the Deputy-Governors 50 shares each and the Régents 30 shares. With Bank of France stock quoted at 6000 francs a share, as it was last summer, these holdings represented the considerable sums of £8,400, £4,200 and £2,520. Such amounts are beyond the reach of the average Government official. Thus the choice of the nation's agents fell into the hands of the Régents, who could grant or refuse to candidates an opportunity for borrowing the necessary shares, or purchasing them on easy instalments. The functionaries, moreover, when their terms ended, would be on the look-out for remunerative employment. They would naturally commit no act

seriously displeasing to the men able to dispense or withhold desirable jobs. The result was that a microscopic nucleus of families gained impregnable and hereditary command of the bank's entire resources, and with them mastery of the economic welfare of a nation of 44,000,000.

No doubt as a concession to the Radical-Socialist Party, the coalition's majority of Socialists and Communists left the stockholders, including even the "Two Hundred Families," in undisturbed possession of shares and dividends. The three Auditors were retained, with their original powers; they continued to be elected by the stock-owners. Preserved also, as State appointees, were the Governor and two Deputy-Governors. The Napoleonic system, together with its abuses, was in other respects destroyed root and branch by *Le new deal*. The General Assembly was enlarged to include all the 40,947 stock-holders, of whom 40,747 had been totally disfranchised. Regardless of the amount of their investments, each received one vote and no more. It was made legal to cast the ballots by mail. Instead of the General Council, there was erected a Committee of twenty-six, consisting of the Governor, Deputy-Governors, Censeurs and twenty advisers. Three of the last were to be chosen by the shareholders. Others were to be experts from the Treasury, and representatives of co-operative societies of consumers, labour unions and organizations of producers, tradesmen and small industry. One member was to be chosen by secret ballot among the bank's

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employees. Finally, it was declared unnecessary for the government's representatives to own stock, and they were forbidden, at the end of their terms, to accept private employment. And so, under the leadership of Premier Blum, that august institution which had been the *Banque de France* became in spirit, if not yet in name, the *Banque de la France*. The monosyllable thus inserted was merely a definite article of two letters, but the difference in sense was monumental. It signified a revolution of policy and organization, a radical shift as to centre of gravity. The Bank of France had been in the first instance a monetary organ, and only in the second a national one. Thenceforth it was to be an instrument secondarily financial ; its primary purpose had become social.

CHAPTER XII

THREE CRISES

THE chapter just ended may have conveyed an idea that Premier Blum's administration began with a halcyon era of fraternity and peace. Such an impression would not be erroneous, so far as the campaign pledges of the Leftist *entente* were involved. But outside that field, in swift succession, rose a series of emergencies so perilous that a majority of spectators, in France and abroad, expected from week to week the collapse of the Popular Front government. A detailed account of the Prime Minister's domestic and foreign policies does not fall within the scope of the present volume. They are fresh in memory ; and some, as this is written, are yet in process. But three major crises should be rehearsed if only to illustrate his astonishing flexibility of technique as a ruler. The first, a storm of strikes which attained the proportions of a national whirlwind, threatened to shatter the new *Cartel des gauches* before it assumed power. It was conquered by the method of indefatigable patience and conciliation. The issue of neutrality in the Spanish Civil War proved still more formidable, and came near exciting a rebellion not merely of Communists but the Premier's personal retinue of Socialists. He cut the knot with a stroke of instant and audacious decision which rendered him for a space the most unpopular personage of the alliance, but to which he clung with the unshakable resolution of the "monarch" of his theory. The devaluation of the franc was a problem, which no

minister since Poincaré had dared confront. M. Blum overcame every difficulty through the supreme tactical skill with which he presented his solution to Parliament in the guise of an accomplished and international reality. His diverse procedures were all successful ; so much so that, after eight months, he had not only preserved but clearly multiplied the strength with which he took office.

On May 26, 1936, at the Nieuport-Astra aeroplane factory in Issy-les-Moulineaux, Paris, eight hundred working-men laid down their tools. Within twenty-four hours the chief metallurgical plants of the metropolitan area were closed. At the Renault motor-car shops, on the south bank of the Seine, thirty thousand men quit work. The movement swept over France as if its soil had been mined with gunpowder. Only a week later, when M. Blum undertook to form a government, the national economy was all but paralysed by a strike of half a million workers. Industries suitable to the manufacture of war material were first involved, such as steel, aeroplanes, motor-cars, chemicals and electrical apparatus. Scores of other crafts became affected, including transport, shipping, mines, quarries, the building trades, textiles, paper-making, laundries, victualling, department stores and newspaper delivery. Throughout the country the demand of the strikers was generally the same : instant performance of three of the Popular Front's pledges—the 40-hour week, a rise of wages and yearly holidays of a fortnight with pay. From end to end

of France also the strategy was identical. Instead of merely walking out, as they had done in previous strikes, the workers took possession of the plants where they were employed ; ejected, imprisoned or forbade entrance to executives and clerical staffs, as representing the owners ; seized upon the main ganglion of each factory, its telephone exchange ; improvised a system of provisioning from without, by relatives and friends ; and announced that they would evacuate the premises only if obliged to do so by armed force. They did not invent the occupational strike. It had been preached by the Mahatma Gandhi, practised by the Fascisti as an instrument to power in Italy and employed during a recent combat in the American rubber industry. But the method was sensationally new to France. It was calculated to create a maximum of terror among the proprietors. They were unable to use strike-breakers ; they could count on little assistance from a government of popular character ; and they were not slow to discern that the seizure of their factories was a thrust at private ownership itself.

They were still more alarmed, if possible, by the drastic discipline which was self-imposed by the workers. The latter set pickets over themselves, to prevent robbery, sabotage, smoking and noisy demonstrations ; even singing in chorus was frowned upon. In many cases the strikers swept and garnished the offices, painted the floors and, if needed, repaired the plumbing. Not a few managers confessed that their plants had never been

so well safeguarded, as during this period, against fire, theft and malicious damage. The convulsion was not wanting in picturesque and even humorous aspects. The "white collar" class entered the fray when 6000 clerks took possession of four of the largest insurance companies in Paris. Throngs of day labourers, particularly in the Seine et Oise Department, occupied the farms on which they were at work. In several instances, the police force of a community "sat down" in the City Hall, and defied the Mayor to oust them. Cashiers, cloakroom attendants and waiters took possession of night clubs. Ships in port were occupied by their crews, who set the officers ashore and adopted their own measures against stealing, fire and injury to cargoes. Half the stock in one of the capital's department stores, *La Samaritaine*, is owned by its employees, who struck against themselves and held out to the bitter end, long after the capitalist shops had arranged their difficulties. A delegation of concierges presented a platform of two planks—a full night's sleep and a key for every tenant. The Amazonian cook of a Paris doctor declared a stay-in strike, barricaded herself among pots, pans and provisions, and held the fort against all comers for a week. Placards along the Seine warned suicides that they would jump in the water at their own risk, as the lifeboat men were on strike.

A movement which began with a simple spark, which almost at once towered over France like a giant firework, and which repeated in hundreds of flares and star-shells exactly the same pattern—a

phenomenon thus swift and uniform presupposed, for some observers, a master artificer, a central managing brain. Journals of the Right conjured up the vision of an anonymous, occult Minister of the Masses, plotting in darkest secrecy to overturn the Republic. Léon Trotsky, in his remote Northern exile, was among the persons designated for this sinister eminence. But calmer reason decided that power so overwhelming could not justly be imputed to the "Fourth International." Another suspect was Josef Stalin. But of all quarters in Paris, the Russian Embassy was visibly most beside itself with anxiety. The upheaval was aimed primarily at the fabrication of munitions, with the result of damaging the armed force of Moscow's one ally. Could it be, then, some nameless ogre brewing charms in the lairs of the Confédération Générale du Travail? Three months earlier, at Toulouse, this organization had patched up a Popular Front with the Communist unions; the prevailing impression was that the Marxian syndicalists had engulfed their brethren of the Second International. But the strike exhibited one peculiar trait. It started among organized crafts, but after the first day or so became predominantly non-union. Labour leaders were frankly dismayed by the rapidity and proportions of the movement, which, in so far as they were concerned, got completely out of hand. Finally, was it a machination of French Communists for betraying the coalition to which they had sworn fealty? Such was the verdict of Jacques Bardoux

of the French Institute, who published in *La Revue de Paris* for August 15, 1936, what purported to be a detailed and specific analysis of the convulsion, with the title of *Le Complot soviétique contre la patrie française*.

To understand the thesis of M. Bardoux, it is necessary to recall that in Moscow there are two sovereign bodies, which, as convenience dictates, are at one moment virtually identical and at another officially separate. One is the Russian Communist Party, which rules the country; its secretary-general, Josef Stalin, becomes in virtue of that office successor to the Tsars as Autocrat of All the Russias. The other is the Comintern, or international proletarian organization; its motive for being is the instigation of a world-revolution of the masses. In contests between them it is always the Third International, nominally superior, which yields to its subordinate branch. Both hold that a Communist revolution in France is the most desirable thing on earth; for the particular reason, says M. Bardoux, that it might provoke an attack by Germany on her western neighbour. While their ally was being destroyed, the Muscovites believe they could settle with Japan in the Orient; after which they would not hesitate, single-handed, to confront the Third Reich. Therefore, M. Bardoux declares, the idea of a Franco-German War has become, for the Soviet dictatorship, a very "abscess of fixation." It may be imagined, his recital continues, that neither the Russian Government nor the Third International refused consent

when the French Communist Party, elated by its triumph in the spring elections, proposed to launch the attack with a general strike which would be insurrectionist rather than industrial. It was the French Communists, in this version, who selected May 26 and the Nieuport-Astra factory as the time and place of the opening assault, who introduced the method of the occupational strike and promoted its spread throughout the country. The Marxists themselves, the narrative proceeds, were astounded by the swiftness and extent of the victory. They grew convinced they were masters of the situation. Still with the consent of Moscow, they set five o'clock on the morning of June 12 as the hour when the strikers would organize into soviets, declare themselves owners of the properties they had seized, and proclaim the French Soviet Socialist Republic. Maurice Thorez, secretary-general of the S.F.I.C., spoke before a meeting held on Sunday, June 7, at the Palais des Sports. Premier Blum was present. "The Communists," Thorez was quoted as exclaiming, "have loyally supported the present Government. Nevertheless, they have nothing in common with it. Before long, we shall be in power. I repeat, comrades—before long!" He was discredited, before long, as an oracle. Perhaps the voice of the Russian Ambassador to France at last made itself heard. According to M. Bardoux, one of the Slavic agents who swarm in Paris kept his wits about him. This was Nicolas Schewernik, director of the Red Labour International, or *Profintern*. He advised Moscow that

a Communist revolt would meet with certain disaster. The peasants were hostile, and the army would obey the General Staff. Neither had as yet been sufficiently indoctrinated. Presumably Josef Stalin, tyrant of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, spoke severely to Josef Stalin, member of the Executive Committee of the Third International. At any rate, Tartar fiats showered upon Paris. The revolution was adjourned. Citizen Thorez failed to arrive on June 12 at the position entailed by his office—that of the Stalin of France. Instead, on the very same evening, he was protesting to a crowd of disgruntled Marxists that anyone can begin a strike, but that it takes brains “to know how to end one.” Of all these facts, M. Bardoux asserts, Premier Blum, his Cabinet and the Department of Justice were fully aware.

The preceding history, in the writer's opinion, errs as to one essential particular. During an interview on July 8, M. Thorez denied that the Communists started the strike, and added: “Certainly we tried to help the workers after it had begun.” For two reasons I am satisfied he spoke the truth. The first is that his denomination has never allowed false modesty to withhold it from seizing any credit that could safely be attached. In the second place, had the Communist Party not existed, there would have been a strike just the same in the metallurgical crafts during the spring of 1936, and the movement would have swept spontaneously over France. A boom had been flourishing in munitions, and the profits had not been

suffered to filter among the workers. A single outcome was possible—a strike in the heavy industries. This relatively feeble shock was able to set off a national explosion because the toilers throughout the country chanced to be in a highly combustible temper. They had been inflamed for months with harangues in which elysian boons were promised if they voted the Popular Front into power. They did so. But three weeks passed, and the millennium had not yet dawned. They failed to understand that M. Blum's hesitation was caused by the refusal of Communists and labour unions to accept the responsibilities as well as benefits of victory. Impatience sharpened into suspicion. Were the masses again to be betrayed by their leaders? What if the purpose of this mysterious delay were that of allowing the *Deux cents familles* to place their wealth in safety, beyond the reach of confiscation? As a result of the Leftist triumph at the polls, the franc fell, stocks slumped on the Bourse and raids began on the gold reserves of the Bank of France. M. Blum had not yet determined to become Prime Minister. There were rumours that he would attempt to form a Cabinet with Vincent Auriol, say, as Premier, and himself in charge of Foreign Affairs. But he was still the recognized spokesman of the coalition. As such, on May 11, he assembled the leading financiers of Paris and addressed them with soothing words. What is more, he was the principal orator on May 15 at the American Club, before an audience containing numerous figures from the monetary

world and representatives of the "Two Hundred Families." So ultra-modish was the gathering that even a London newspaper hastened to report: "M. Blum, since his conservative speech of last Sunday, has become for the moment the darling of the bankers. Some who saw him surrounded by a fashionable audience at to-day's luncheon wondered whether he was not in danger of being captured by the Duchesses as well." If the fact was dark to this great journal, the French populace could not be expected to comprehend that Léon Blum was no Ramsay MacDonald; and that for him, as the son of a merchant prince and a former literary lion, bankers and Duchesses both were *vieux jeu*.

It was therefore into a sort of national firedamp of irritation and mistrust that the Paris strike fell like a wisp of burning tinder. The French labour chieftains are usually clever men; often they are not workers but intellectuals. They had as a matter of course studied the practice of the occupational strike in Italy and the United States, and drafted designs for its introduction into France at the next emergency. The strategy which they used, for the first time in that country, against the aeroplane and automobile workshops of Paris, was instantly described in detail by newspapers in every corner of the land. Those who require the intervention of a "master mind" underrate, in my judgment, the quick and imitative intelligence of the French people. Here was a facile and captivating new toy with which any one could play, clerks no less than

artisans, non-union as well as organized labour. The measures of discipline undertaken by the strikers were exacted by obvious self-interest. None knew better than they that the sit-down tactic was illegal. It would have been folly to add public disorder as a second and compulsory occasion for police interference. As for the Communists, if they did not initiate the movement, assuredly they strove to turn it to factional advantage. Their leaders, and in particular their newly-elected Deputies, became conspicuous in the strike's direction. No doubt the hotter-brained among them were certain that the hour had struck for a Marxist conquest of the French Republic.

When M. Blum entered office as Premier, hundreds of thousands of workers were engaged in a new and redoubtable kind of insurrection, and one of his allies was toying at least with a conspiracy to overthrow him in the next eight days. Communists and Radicals were on the verge of springing at each other's throat. The former proclaimed that the sit-down strike, as its chief merit, accustoms popular thought to the notion that factories and shops belong to the workers instead of to their legal owners. The Radicals were prepared to denounce the alliance rather than see private enterprise jeopardized; they demanded that force be used to evacuate the strikers. Thousands of members of this party belong, in a small way, to the *patronat*, or employing caste. It was a crisis invoking action at once swift and wary. The Premier assured his Radical-Socialist

confederates that he would respect the system of private ownership. He flatly declined, however, except as a last resort, to employ the police arm or the military. Such a procedure, he affirmed, in the country's mood, would bring about civil war and bloodshed. Was it not preferable, he asked, that the workers, instead of fighting in the streets with the Fascist paramilitia, should harmlessly lock themselves inside the factories? Their demands were not exorbitant; they embodied, in truth, redresses which the Radical Party itself had sponsored. On the other side, in a radio broadcast of June 5, he warned the strikers not to force the government's hand through lawless deeds or interruption of the nation's vital services. He pledged himself to lay instantly before the Chamber projects for collective bargaining, paid holidays and the 40-hour week. Employers were begged to examine the demands of their workers in "a spirit of equity," and the public was commended to take a calm view of the situation, paying no heed to "credulous exaggerations and perfidious rumours." The Minister did not confine himself to genial words and attendance on the processes of legislation. He called a series of conferences between employers and labour leaders, and conducted their negotiations with such dispatch that on June 8 he could announce the signing of a peace treaty—the *Accord Matignon*, so named from the palace in the Rue de Varenne where it was concluded, and which houses the *Présidence du Conseil*. The capitalists acknowledged the right of their employees

to form trade unions and bargain collectively ; they granted wage increases of from 7 to 15 per cent. The union men agreed to order their followers to vacate the premises under occupation.

This was the turning point of the strike, though not its end. Violations of the pact occurred on both sides. A few employers evaded their covenants. More than one union defied its leaders and voted to continue the strike till its requisitions became law. With firm good humour, such estrays were guided into the fold. There still remained throngs of unorganized workers who were outside union jurisdiction, and had to be dealt with as separate groups. For each unit it was necessary to draft an individual contract, and arrange a settlement with its respective employer. A hint was uttered by M. Blum that the toils of his Cabinet would be lessened if it could treat principally with unionized labour. The authority already attained by his government was reflected by a rush of new members such as the *Confédération Générale du Travail* could scarcely handle. In a few weeks its rolls mounted from 2,500,000 to 4,000,000. During his multitudinous labours of mediation the Prime Minister made use chiefly of the services of his Secretary of the Interior, Roger Salengro, Socialist Mayor of Lille.¹ So vast a conflagration could not

¹ Instead of the Postmaster-General, as in the United States, the "political" member of a French Cabinet is the Minister of the Interior. M. Salengro's share in composing the stay-in strikes drew upon him the opposition's particular hatred. Some months afterwards he killed himself as a result of slanders concerning his war record which were plied by a "nationalist" sheet.

be extinguished at once. For a time it appeared as if the flames were subdued in one spot only to break out in another. If peace was made in Normandy, hostilities blazed forth in the Riviera hotels, or in Algiers. While each outburst was handled as it rose, the Popular Front's *revendications* were driven steadfastly through Parliament. Within a period surprisingly short, the movement was brought under control. On July 7, 1171 factories were occupied by 120,381 artisans. A week later the number had fallen to 613 plants held by 73,703 strikers. On July 14 alone 91 shops were evacuated by 4365 workers. M. Salengro had been able on July 8 to assure the Senate that "if to-morrow offices, factories, shops and farms are occupied, the Government intend to stop such practices by all appropriate means." Not long afterwards the Prime Minister ordered the police to evict chocolate-makers who took possession of a Paris plant. They did not resist, and there was no popular outcry. He had calculated correctly that the workers, with their demands generally satisfied, could no longer count on public or even class sympathy. To all intents and purposes the strike was over. An industrial contest fraught with national danger had been appeased with only one act of violence¹ and without the loss of a life. Premier Blum could appropriate to himself a flourish of Aristide Briand which he is fond of citing: "Look at my hands—not one drop of blood!"

¹ The son of an employer in the northern area wounded a striker with a pistol. It was the only shot fired throughout the disturbance.

If the French Communists were still smarting under the fiasco of June 12, they must have exulted that the adversary had been delivered into their hands through an incident occurring just as news of the stay-in strike began to vanish from the daily papers. Elections of the previous February in Spain had brought to power its own Leftist alliance, the rule of which was signalized by rapid changes of ministry, with incessant riots and assassinations. On July 19, "for serious political reasons," communication with Madrid was cut off. The next day it became known that a military insurrection, led by General Franco, was in control of Spanish Morocco, and that rebel transports were crossing the Straits of Gibraltar from Africa. On July 26 the *Frente popular* appealed confidently to the *Front Populaire* for supplies of arms. An affirmative response would have been impregnably legal under international usage, since the Madrid régime was the officially constituted government of Spain. To the consternation of all his followers except the Radicals, Premier Blum returned a downright refusal. Communists and labour leaders burst into passionate revolt. Their fury redoubled on July 30 when two vessels of a squadron of armed Italian aeroplanes, bound for Spanish Morocco, landed by mistake in Algiers and were seized by the French authorities. Thereupon the veteran discipline of the Socialist Party was strained to the snapping-point. The Prime Minister's own newspaper turned upon him; each morning *Le Populaire* vied with *l'Humanité* in headlines screaming for intervention.

During a meeting of Socialists and Communists, at Saint-Cloud, the head of the government was assailed with ferocious shouts of "Arms and aeroplanes for Spain !" The mutiny of his hecklers was plausibly inspired. Since Italy, and Germany too, in contravention of the international code, were dispatching munitions to their Fascist disciples, why should the French State deny lawful succour to its fellow-believers ?

M. Blum answered, on August 2, by making his entrance with a virtuoso's gesture upon the stage of continental diplomacy, in which, until now, he had been an unknown figure. It was the first time that democracy in Europe dared look Fascism in the face. He suggested that the principal countries form a compact, to be signed at once and rigidly observed, pledging themselves to non-intervention. The British Cabinet leaped to sustain the French proposal ; Russia agreed on August 10. The brilliance of the move required no further evidence than the embarrassment into which it plunged Germany and Italy. The truth became clear that by surrendering his vantage-ground the Premier had acted like a chess-player who sacrifices the queen in order to assure checkmate. His renunciation left the Fascist Powers without a valid excuse for denial. They shifted this pawn and that, only to find that the game was inexorably pinned to the board. Germany signed on August 17. Italy squirmed five days longer, and accepted. Mussolini and Hitler were obliged to concede in effect that they had been outwitted by a novice. Any assist-

ance they gave the Spanish rebels henceforth must be clandestine and violative of their public oaths. It may be affirmed that the Paris statesman's initiative rendered unlikely a possible European war. In Spain the *Deux mystiques* of Communism and Fascism met for the first time in armed opposition. The chiefs of both philosophies desired their sectaries to win. From hoping victory to abetting it is merely a pace. The hazard which M. Blum at the outset foreboded was that reinforcements would be sent by Russia and France on one hand, and by Germany and Italy on the other ; and that inevitably some incident would arise wounding to "national honour"—after which, the deluge. Maturer comprehension of his grounds of action brought the Socialists back to their allegiance. When the Premier was ready, a few months afterwards, to challenge a vote of confidence on the Spanish question, he could disdain the abstention of the Communists, for he had behind him a solid majority of the nation.

Since Poincaré's devaluation of the franc wiped out four-fifths of its content at one blow, an axiom of French politics had been that the people would rebel rather than suffer added inflation. Minister after Minister eluded the issue, while the gold reserves of the Bank of France dropped from their maximum of 83,000,000,000 francs, in the winter of 1932, to three-fifths of that sum. Out of a clear sky, on September 26, 1936, Premier Blum announced that for three months his government had been in secret negotiation with the Treasuries

of Great Britain and the United States ; that all had consented to a realignment of the franc with the pound sterling and the dollar ; and that, so far from endeavouring reprisals, the two great monetary powers had agreed to enlist their stabilizing funds with that of France for the better security of international currency. On the same day, M. Blum introduced in the Chamber a Bill cutting the gold value of the franc by approximately 25 per cent. It is interesting to remark that in France, unlike the United States, devaluation was in general favoured by big business, and opposed by the plebeian sects as a device for bolstering up the capitalist order. Nevertheless, so hypnotic were the pomp and circumstance with which the measure had been adorned that it passed the Chamber, in three days, by a vote of 350 to 221. The Senate revolted, not at the main provision, but at a hotchpotch of reform legislation with which the Chamber had cluttered the Bill. So assured was the Upper House that the ministry would prefer defeat to resigning these extraneous clauses that Camille Chautemps had to announce his unwillingness, if M. Blum were overthrown, to attempt the Premiership. The latter, instead, was probably delighted with the Senate's amendments : he induced the Chamber to re-enact the ordinance, on October 2, substantially as it was returned from the Palais Luxembourg. Impressed by the statute's international brocades and its air of a *fait accompli*, about which nothing could be done, the populace not only desisted from manning the boulevards but

accepted calmly the misfortune that twenty of its francs instead of fifteen were now required to purchase a dollar.

It is not easy to close this narrative without indulging an active curiosity regarding the pages history has yet to subjoin upon Léon Blum's career and the future of his party and country. Certainly, after eight months in office, he could have amended in a particular or so his treatise on legislative reform. Other motives than loyalty, he had ascertained, may bind together a majority even discordant—self-interest, for example, and the cohesion of success. He could pronounce that a minister of adroitness and character has a tolerable chance of survival if he starts with one faithful, disciplined battalion, like his own Socialists; and if all his heterogeneous regiments have united in advance on a definite, though limited, objective—like the Popular Front programme—through which they may acquire the habit of campaigning in common. The writer has no wish to play the rôle of prophet, whose auguries, before they are published, may be contradicted by events. But I should not be astonished if M. Blum's Ministry came to rival in longevity the Third Republic's most stable Cabinets, each of which, by an odd coincidence, enjoyed a tenure of three years.¹ Should it be objected that the Premier is no longer

¹ These were the ministries of Jules Méline (1895-98); Pierre-Ernest Waldeck-Rousseau (1899-1902); Émile Combes (1902-5); Georges Clemenceau* (1906-9); and Clemenceau again (1917-20).

young, the answer would be first that he has made a science of safeguarding the health and energies of a constitution far from robust ; and second, that the exploits for which Disraeli is remembered took place after his seventieth birthday. He was seventy-one when he snatched control of the Suez Canal, and seventy-two when he brought to pass the Royal Titles Act, which made Queen Victoria Empress of India. At seventy-four he was virile enough to grasp the leadership of the Congress of Berlin from Bismarck, though the latter was eleven years younger, and was fortified with the renown of two victorious wars.

The annals of the Third Republic have followed a pattern curiously invariable. At the Left of the Chamber emerges a Radical group which is impotent as to numbers, but gains in strength till at last it succeeds in wresting the crown from its Conservative rulers. The Liberals then take office. They likewise become sobered or corrupted by power, and in turn gravitate imperceptibly to the Right. Another revolutionary clan springs up, and the operation is repeated. Thus the clerical royalists who supported Thiers were conquered in 1875 by the Republican Party. Its chieftain, Léon Gambetta, was regarded in his time as an agitator more pernicious than Léon Blum seems to-day. Nevertheless, after some years, the Opportunists, as they now styled themselves, evolved into the ultra-conservative organ of large-scale capital. Thereupon, at their Left, appeared the Radical-Socialist Party, representing minor industry. Under

the leadership of Clemenceau, it vanquished the Republicans in 1902 and began its own glacial progress to the Right. The position it abandoned fell into the possession of the Socialist Party, at first the protégé, indulgently tolerated, of the Radicals ; and by degrees their ally and master. Each revolution occupied in round figures a generation ;¹ and no party, once defeated, has returned to power. At present the Socialists form the dominant, if not yet sovereign, party of France. The Communists, at their Left, have assumed the character played in succession by Republicans, Radicals and Socialists. Should the design which has persisted for more than sixty years, through peace and war, once more reproduce itself, the Socialists, at the elections of 1940, should make further inroads at the expense of the Radicals, and perhaps attain the absolute majority of M. Blum's vision. They should thereafter enjoy a lease of government approximating a quarter-century, wax more and more conservative, and finally be supplanted by the Communists.

It may very well be, however, that some sort of modified Socialism is the ultimate level which France since the Revolution has been seeking, and that this is the norm wherein it is fated to strike an equilibrium more or less enduring. The very term, a French authoritarian State, whether Marxist or Fascist, impresses one as a contradiction. But it is obvious that the racial character shows an affinity with certain aspects of the Jaurist creed. The latter

¹ The Republicans reigned twenty-seven years and the Radicals thirty-four

is resolved, for instance, to preserve many of the liberal institutions which it has inherited from middle-class culture, and which are dear to the Gallic temper, such as freedom of press and speech and representative government. The French instinct for equality would be gratified by two reforms which Premier Blum, if liberated from his treaty with the Radical Party, would doubtless put into effect—the spoliation, by one device or another, of the class which subsists on investments and the expropriation of all large bourgeois enterprises which he has begun by nationalizing the munitions industry. On the other hand, Socialism of his school is willing to temporize with those profound individualistic passions which are ingrained in the national ethos. It is possible that the future may breed a generation of French peasants without hunger for their private patches of soil, and of tradesmen without ambition to possess their own shops. But that hour seems definitely remote. In the meanwhile, the project of eradicating such traits by force would appear to M. Blum quite as absurd as that of suppressing the polygamous phase in men and women. Should these hypotheses be sound, then Marxism will exert a steadily diminishing pressure on public affairs, and will not displace its rival sect in 1965. The Premier has been quoted as declaring that his country, if obliged to choose between Fascism and Communism, would probably elect the former. A protracted rule of economic democracy in France; under the intellectual inspiration of leaders such as Jaurès, Lucien Herr

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and Léon Blum and the auspices of one of the superlatively enlightened races of history, would perform, in the judgment of many students, an invaluable service to mankind. There, as in a laboratory, with conditions most favouring, could be tested once and for all an experiment of decisive moment to civilization. That question is whether the proletariat, as master, will prove in the long run to be possessed of virtues superior, or exempt from vices equivalent, to those of any previous ruling caste, monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy or *bourgeoisie*.



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